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WAS THE HIT PC POINT-AND-CLICK AS GREAT TO CREATE AS IT WAS TO PLAY?

# SHOOT-'EM-UPS

DEVELOPERS CELEBRATE OVER FIFTY YEARS OF FRANTIC BLASTING

BACK TO THE 90s

ANDREW HEWSON: "I ALWAYS FELT THE AMSTRAD CPC WAS A BIT SOULLESS"

HISTORY OF REBELSTAR

THE MAKING OF... BLACK WIDOW

OLIVER FREY

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# THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UP



## DARRAN JONES

It's clearly *Robotron: 2084*, a game that requires tremendous skill and constantly assaults you from all sides. I also have a soft spot for the rather brilliant *Thunder Force III*.

**Expertise:**
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

**Currently playing:**
*Lost Kingdoms*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Strider*



## NICK THORPE

The dynamic difficulty of *Border Down* is punishing, but it kept me glued to my Dreamcast for ages. It didn't hurt that it looked amazing, either.

**Expertise:**
Owning six Master Systems (I sold one)

**Currently playing:**
*Yakuza 2*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sonic The Hedgehog*



## PAUL DRURY

At home, it's obviously *Sheep In Space* but in the arcade, it's *Juno First* for the 'blast them as you flee' mechanic and *Gyruss* for the sense of satisfaction at finally reaching Earth…

**Expertise:**
Double flap technique on *Track & Field*

**Currently playing:**
*Tower Of Guns*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sheep In Space*



## JONATHAN WELLS

It has to be *Space Invaders*, a game so simple, yet so addictive. Even my mum can grasp it, and she's a person who struggles with the TV remote!

**Expertise:**
Takling dirty nappies and retro spreads

**Currently playing:**
*Mortal Kombat X*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Day Of The Tentacle*



## PAUL DAVIES

*Thunderforce III* was amazing, so it's got to be that. Although I did obsess over *R-Type*…

**Expertise:**
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall

**Currently playing:**
*Destiny*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*



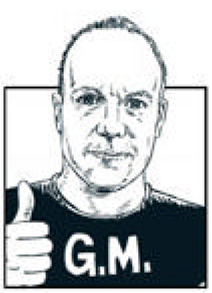
## DAVID CROOKES

*R-Type*, which I would say is the best horizontal scrolling shoot-'em-up that was ever made and has translated well to many a platform.

**Expertise:**
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is that retro? Debate!)

**Currently playing:**
*Grim Fandango*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Broken Sword*



## GRAEME MASON

I know it's not widely considered a great but I love *1942*. I think it must be the World War II theme as opposed to the mass of sci-fi shooters.

**Expertise:**
30 years of gaming, C64 a speciality

**Currently playing:**
*Alien: Isolation*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Resident Evil 4*



## ANDREW FISHER

Armalyte (C64) - a beautifully polished game with heaps and heaps of challenge.

**Expertise:**
30 years of gaming, C64 a speciality

**Currently playing:**
*Bruce Lee II (C64)*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Paradroid*



## JASON KELK

My all-time favourite shoot 'em up is *Io* on the C64 and probably always will be!

**Expertise:**
Being a homebrew hero

**Currently playing:**
*Kikstart (C16)*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Io*

# LOADING...



I've always loved playing shoot-'em-ups. It's the genre I always found myself gravitating towards in the arcades and they've had a big impact on my gaming growing up. I remember being in awe of *Space Invaders* when I was a little kid, sweating with perspiration after a marathon session on *Robotron: 2084* at Poole Quay Amusements and staring in amazement at the screenshots of *Axelay* in *Mean Machines*. I can still recall the first time I took down the level 3 boss in *R-Type*, I remember the excitement of securing a Japanese This Is Cool Saturn with 28 essential shmups for £500 and laughing at the absurdity of Konami's *Parodius*.

To me, shmups represent gaming in its truest forum, requiring a keen eye, good reflexes and great discipline. They're a way to unwind, a way to let off some steam and a way to marvel at intricate bullet patterns and immense bosses. Playing shmups makes me feel happy and we can all do with enjoying our games.

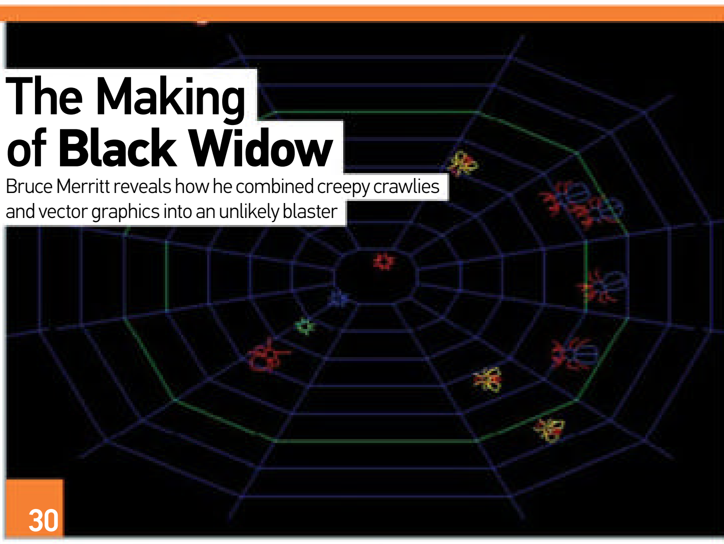
It makes me extremely happy, then, to have a cover devoted to this absolutely amazing genre, and a cover designed by the amazing Oliver Frey no less. It's styled on a classic *Zzap!64* cover, but I feel it's different enough to feel like its own piece of work.

Enjoy the magazine!



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**>> Load 142** Breathing new life into classic games









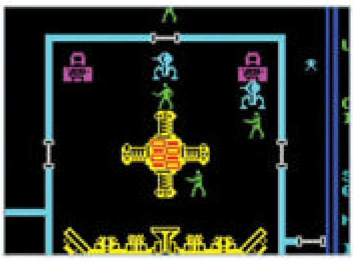
## RETRO RADAR



## REVIVALS

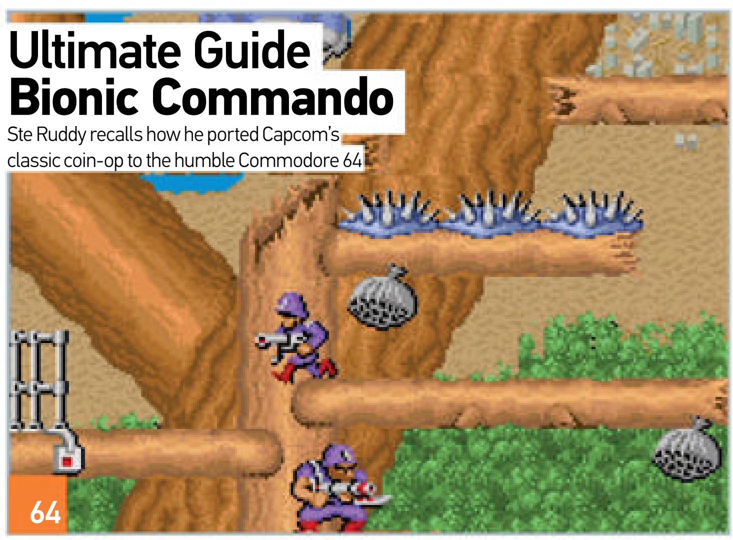


## FEATURED









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**"We don't know where we would be without multiplayer games"**



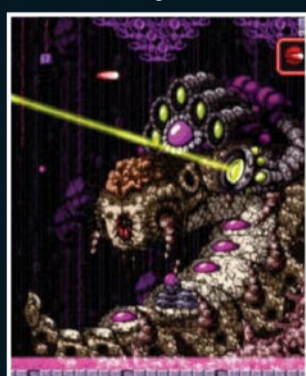






## REVIEWS







## ESSENTIALS





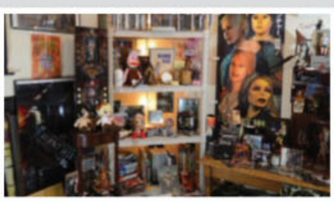


# THE BEAST RISES

**Matt Birch on updating the Amiga classic for a new generation**

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**It's been nearly two years since *Shadow Of The Beast* was first announced for PS4. Heavy Spectrum Entertainment Labs** recently revealed its first playable build, which clearly takes inspiration from the original game, while adding a *Batman: Arkham*-styled combat engine. Matt Birch, the CEO and founder of Heavy Spectrum is confident that gamers are going to enjoy the new direction that *Shadow Of The Beast* is headed in.

**What was it about the original game that caught your imagination?**
I've been playing games since I was quite small, from the ZX Spectrum era and so on. I played *Shadow Of The Beast* at a very impressionable age and had just turned 16. I went around to my friend's house and he had his Amiga there and he wanted to show me this game. We sat there all night playing *Shadow Of The Beast* and it just made such a huge impression on me.

**So it was a big deal then?**
We were talking about it and asking each other questions saying, "why is this there? Why is that there? Then we just started filling it all in and it made this big impression on me. I walked away and it hit me that it was a game where I was filling in blanks rather than following the mechanics. It became more than a game – it was an experience.

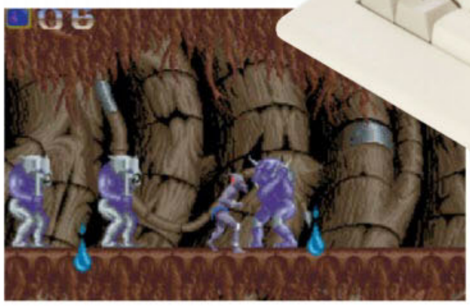
**Tell us about the game's lore.**
I wanted to make sure that with this game we did the same thing and we've written out loads of lore on all the details in the game. This is one of the reasons why it was so emotional when we showed the screenshots for the first time. I know why that statue is the position it's in and why it's there, but I don't want to expose all that to the player either. I want to make sure that when they pick this up they can have that ability [themselves]. There's a little bit in the game where they can make their own notes about why things are there. Hopefully they'll walk away with their own personalised experience.


» Matt Birch

**How did you end up working on *Shadow Of The Beast*?**
I talked to [External Development Studio Europe] about different games and one of the questions was 'if you could chose something, what would you chose?' And I said, 'well there was this game that when I played it, it created a whole bunch of emotions in me and I'd like to give that to players today.' PlayStation 4 is a huge step of living room technology and for me it just seemed like the right time to create the visions that were in my head from when I [first] played it and realise them in a way a player of today could go and explore. One of the great things about External is that they took the time to listen to what in essence were the ramblings of an excited 16-year old coming through an older man's body. They listened and said: 'Actually that does sound really cool and really interesting. Let's go with this.'

**How will this new *Shadow Of The Beast* differ to the original?**
I've always seen the beast as this brutal character. Back in the original game he got through hundreds of enemies, way more than you'd get through in a modern fighting game. In the first fight in the demo you get through 35 guys. That gives you an idea of the speed





» [Amiga] *SOTB* wasn't acclaimed for its gameplay, so we'll be watching this reboot with great interest.

and the ferociousness and it's just something that doesn't really happen in modern games. 25 years of games have happened since then so we've got to come up with different ways of doing that and coming up with a different way of allowing that kind of game experience to exist. That's what we've tried to do and we're hoping that people can engage with that. Once we started talking about those mechanics it all seemed to come together. When we got the go ahead it was like a red-letter day for me. The whole team's behind it, it's been a very personal project, so I'm hoping that people enjoy it.

**Is it similar to the old game mechanically?**

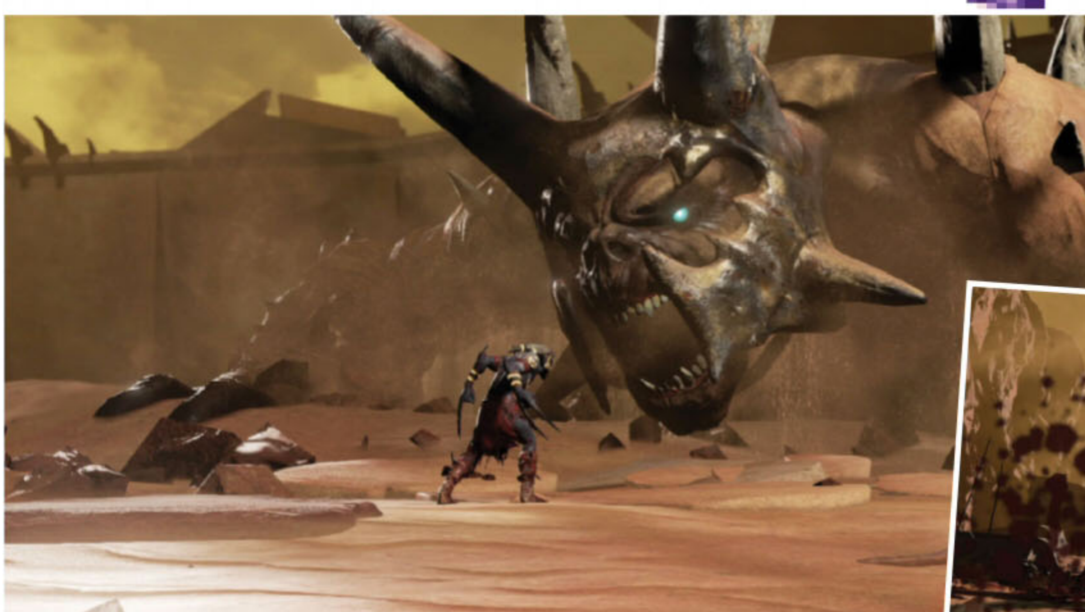
It's combat focused. The original was platform and combat combined in that regard and we've stayed true to that formula, but there are so many things that have happened since then. Why give you a 25-year-old game? That's not something that's going to be compelling to a modern audience. This isn't really about reminiscing; this is about trying to create what I imagined I was playing. We've kept the traditional 2D format, but we've hopefully embellished the gameplay and given you a very different combat experience to what was in the original one. Essentially we are trying to create the combat that was in my head when I played the original. It's a lot more brutal and [your character] is a capable killer who's basically been controlled by evil since he was a baby and then had the blinkers taken off and is new to the world and he's a manufactured killing machine. We really wanted to make you feel the power that he's got. *

» [PS4] The art style is definitely growing on us and feels like a suitable update of the original.



» [PS4] The combat reminds us of a cross between *God Of War* and the Batman's flowing fighting system.

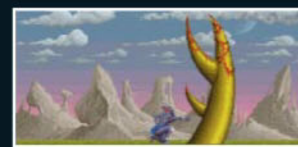






## READERS REACT

### >> Will you buy Shadow Of The Beast?



■ I don't get it, I've played the originals for a bit and got bored.
**DPRINNY**

■ It's such an old franchise I have no idea why it's being revived. The name has virtually no real goodwill attached to it, most people who recall the games at all remember them as vaguely pretty but dull.
**KILLBOT**

■ The original game was amazing in terms of sounds and visuals when it hit Amiga. I think it was one of the first games to have multi-layered scrolling backgrounds. Not really interested in the remake personally but I'm no big fan of the series. The games had a nice art direction though.
**PARANOID MARVIN**

■ I thought the third one was by far the best of the series. I doubt I'll buy this one, but I'll look out for more news, and I'll have a go of the demo if there is one.
**NECRONOM**

■ No. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.
**SCUNNY**

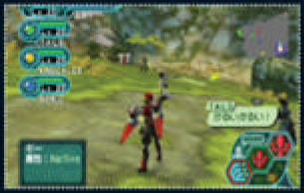
■ The original games might have been style over substance exemplified, but this doesn't appear to have much of either.
**MATT_B**

■ I actually thought *Shadow Of The Beast* *would* be a perfect game to recreate because it was presented amazingly in its first incarnation yet lacked decent gameplay, so I think it's a great idea.
**NCF1**

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

## SERVER SALVATION CLASH

The Electronic Frontier Foundation has clashed with the Entertainment Software Association over a proposed exemption to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which would enable players to keep online games working after publishers shut their servers. Though this is something that players have done with games such as *Phantasy Star Online*, it is illegal in the USA thanks to the anti-circumvention provisions of the law. The ESA argues that any exemption would give the impression that "hacking – an activity closely associated with piracy in the minds of the marketplace – is lawful."



## NEW SEGA 3D CLASSICS

The next round of *Sega 3D Classics* is on the way for Nintendo 3DS owners, and it's a trio of the Mega Drive's most loved games. First up is *Streets Of Rage II*, the classic 1992 beat-'em-up which is launching in July 2015, followed by Treasure's technically masterful run-and-gun *Gunstar Heroes* in August. *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, arguably the best of the blue speedster's games, rounds off the batch in September. Sega is promising new modes and features for all three games, in keeping with previous releases under the *3D Classics* banner.






» [PC] Players can take on a variety of roles in *Descent: Underground*, from heavy combat to resource mining.

# DESCENT RETURNS FROM BELOW

### FPS REBOOT NARROWLY ACHIEVES FUNDING

A new installment of the cult series, *Descent*, is coming in the form of *Descent: Underground*. The game is in development by Descendent Studios after scraping its way to a lofty $600,000 Kickstarter target. The campaign ended with $601,773 in pledges, just enough to ensure that funding would be received under Kickstarter's all-or-nothing crowdfunding model. The new game is a prequel to the original games, and promises a return to the zero gravity action the series is known for. The developer is promising a single-player campaign and tactical multiplayer combat, with destructible environments and ship customisation options.

*Descent* originally launched on PC in 1994 and was something of a sleeper hit, most distinguished by the full freedom of movement that allowed players to move in any direction through 3D environments – a slightly disorienting experience at the best of times. A PlayStation port followed, as well as two sequels and a spin-off in the form of *Descent: Freespace*. The final release was *Descent 3* in 1999. *Descent: Underground* is to release in 2016 on Windows, Mac and Linux, with no plans for console versions. For more information head to the studio's website at descendentstudios.com, where the team is still accepting pledges.



# WHO NEEDS BANJO?

### BANJO-KAZOOIE'S SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR DESTROYS KICKSTARTER

Developer Playtonic must be feeling pretty pleased with itself. Its spiritual successor to *Banjo-Kazooie, Yooka-Laylee,* recently launched on Kickstarter and has smashed records left, right and centre. Playtonic consists of a group of ex-Rare staff, including Chris Sutherland and Steve Mayles, two of the creators of *Banjo-Kazooie,* and its first game has already become the quickest to break the £1 million mark, obliterating its £175,000 goal.

*Yooka-Laylee* stars a cute chameleon and bat and promises to capture the glory days of Rare's N64 period, most notably the *Banjo-Kazooie* era. *Yooka-Laylee* is still a long way from being finished (it's due for release in 2016) but we're confident that the team's pedigree will produce something very special. Expect an interview with Chris Sutherland soon.



» You can pledge your support for Yooka-Laylee by visiting the page at Kickstarter.com.

retro radar column




**Here's my bio... Paul Davies**
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

# Empty Man Cave Blues

**Visit my humble home and take a root around my 'office' and you'll find all kinds of clues to my life. Alongside stuff I'm not here to talk about, there** are stacks of videogames, board games and boxes of music CDs, the latter I rarely go to the trouble of fishing out en masse. With games it's different somehow. I see my history in the jewel cases, the plastic and cardboard boxes. This stuff is 'me'.

Way, way back on the games magazines, we used to invite readers to send in photos of their gaming lairs. Nowadays collectors freely share pics of their meticulously arranged hoards or impressively chaotic tangles of wires extending between pristine examples of retro gear, televisions included. But back then, spying another gamer's den and how everything was respected was as inspiring as it was often hilarious. Hopefully I'm in the right company here to share my geeky thoughts, but wasn't it (and isn't it still) always weird to see the same game that you owned at home, in another place, treated slightly differently and maybe with better colour balance on the artwork or one less crease on the inlay… erm.

It was a time and place thing, a very Eighties happening that I think we should all accept as a bygone. Attempting to guess a personality by the selection of VHS recording tapes with names of programs scratched out, or the ones they'd opted to buy like, maybe, Iron Maiden's *Live After Death* concert or the video collection from Duran Duran's *Rio*. It was the same with the games; boxes of C90 cassette tapes that held pirated copies of anything and everything, but maybe a lovely Acornsoft box for something as modest as the excellent *Pac-Man* rip-off *Snapper* or *Starship Command*. You could tell which games were the presents from those that had been more resourcefully acquired.

At your place, you'd choose to leave out a few boxes of games that maybe you weren't playing right now, but you needed people to think, "wow, he has *Super Aleste* for Super Famicom." Like, you could be watching *Alien* or *American Werewolf* in London that night but having *Street Fighter II* in the corner of your eye was one foot in that awesome world to which you'd return later on or the next day. The entire situation was that cooler because of that box in the room. If I visited a pal who had C64 boxes lined up, that would throw me because I wasn't familiar with that stuff. It would hard to laugh at *Beverly Hills Cop II* if there was a *Wizball* manual left out.

You could tell something about a person, though I still don't know really what, by the place they'd plonk the computer or console for a long session of gaming. On the floor in front of the TV – that's very casual. Perched on top of the TV is kind of risky, no? How about its own special trestle table with a neat little box/ cupboard full of alphabetically organised tapes/ cartridges/discs… he/she is probably joining the army if not a secret agent in your midst already.

Basically, just be careful about what you have on show the next time I'm at your home. Not that I am judging you or anything like that. *

## What do you think?

**Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:**

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk | www.retrogamer.net/forum

# a moment with...



# Jonathan Smith

Paul Drury meets the director of the National Videogame Arcade



» The original *Lego Star Wars* (PS2) remains Jonathan's favourite of the entire *Lego* series

**What can visitors expect from the National Videogame Arcade?**
It's a place where you can discover the widest imaginable breadth of what games have been and what they can be. Hopefully, people will be inspired to think about new ways in which games can be built.

**Why did you decide to call it an 'arcade' rather than a 'museum'?**
Aspects of what we do here are like a gallery, there are aspects that are like a museum and aspects similar to a theme park. We picked 'arcade' as the most satisfying centre point for something that is actually more like a zoo for videogames. You can get a hands-on with the games, like a petting zoo, and strike up a relationship with them. Potentially, it's a place where new mutant animals are genetically modified, reared and brought into the world.

**If you could recommend one game that you've worked on for our readers to play, what would it be?**
I will always have the deepest affection for the original *Lego Star Wars*. An incredibly talented team at Traveller's Tales brought their magic to an idea that seemed obvious once you said it out loud, but which nobody had thought of before, bringing those *Lego* characters to life in a universe people already knew and loved, with humour and freedom for players to experiment and play together.





**Is there a film that you would like to see given the *Lego* treatment that hasn't received it already?**
*Lego* is the universal solvent. Basically anything can be *Lego* and in turn *Lego* can be anything.

**We always thought *Lego A Clockwork Orange* would be good.**
There's actually a render of that character (Alex) on the internet. *Lego* was my life for ten years and so I take that question very seriously. I can't give a glib answer.

**What's your proudest moment working in the industry?**
Pride is a dangerous thing. It's dangerous to feel a sense of personal pride when so much work in videogames is a result of a team effort. I'm proud of the teams that I have been lucky enough to work with and I'm incredibly proud of the team who work at GameCity and the National Videogame Arcade. Actually, my review for *PC Gamer* of the original *Grand Theft Auto* is the piece of writing that I am most proud of as nobody had played it before and I was absolutely blown away by it. At the time it was just a job to me, but I'm proud looking back at it for recognising what it was.



» The National Videogame Arcade is crammed full of gaming delights both old and new.

**Following on from that, what is your biggest disappointment?**
That *Micro Machines 3* didn't continue the 2D top-down view of its predecessors. I genuinely believe *Micro Machines 2* is one of the best games ever made, particularly the Mega Drive incarnation with the extra joypad ports on the cartridge, a combination of both software and hardware innovation that is nothing short of magnificent.

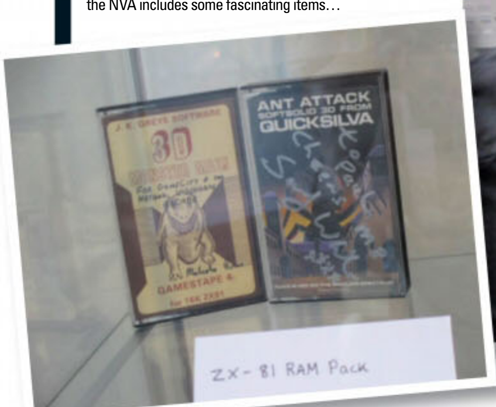
**Which industry figure do you most admire the most?**
Anyone who gets the job done with style. Simple as that.

**As we're speaking to you in the National Videogame Arcade, we have to ask: what is your absolute favourite arcade game?**
*Defender*. It's beautiful to look at, it has an incredible soundtrack and it's challenging, strategic and exciting. *

**See gamecity.org to plan your visit to the National Videogame Arcade and look out for Jonathan who will be marooned as a Desert Island Disks castaway later this year.**



» The 'A History of Videogames in 100 Objects' exhibition at the NVA includes some fascinating items…







» Jonathan button bashes on *Track & Field*, one of the many cabinets to be found in the National Videogame Arcade.



### SILENT HILL SHARON'S DRAWING BLOCK PROP

"This is seen in the first movie when Rose is flipping through Sharon's sketches at the Gas Station. I love it as it's a clearly a prop but its is also a tie to the game being the movie version of Cheryl's sketchbook."

**PAID: "A bonus check from work!"**

### SILENT HILL RETAIL CLOTH BANNER

"This is one of my favourite items. When I first saw it on Yahoo! Japan auctions I passed on buying it in favour of an original *Silent Hill* retail poster. As luck would have it the same seller listed another one a short time later. It's a special item and I only know of one other person who owns it."

**PAID: $250**

### HEATHER RESIN STATUE WITH CUSTOM BASE

"This was a limited edition statue that was rumoured to be given to select *SH3* dev staff to commemorate the completion of the game. The base is inspired by the hospital level of the game."

**PAID: $500**

### SILENT HILL SOUNDTRACK

"I made it a mission to find the soundtracks sealed. This one eluded me for ages with used copies going for over $100. Then a factory one appeared on eBay for $50 and I couldn't believe my luck!"

**PAID: $50**

### SILENT HILL: DEAD/ ALIVE #1E RETAILER INCENTIVE

"This retailer incentive variant is one of the rarest single issues of the *Silent Hill* comics. I contacted hundreds of comic book shops over the world with no luck and I'm really grateful to my friends who were able to find a copy and surprise me with it."

**PAID: $0**

## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

**THAT PIECE YOU CAN'T BE WITHOUT**

**RE-CAST OF SEAL OF METATRON PROP FROM SILENT HILL: REVELATION.**

■ "Besides the original movie prop currently in director Michael J. Bassett's possession, this is the only one in existence, and it's made using the original's mould. It was made and sent to me as a gift by Paul Jones, the special makeup and creature effects designer on the movie."

**PAID: £0 (gift)**

# Collector's corner

## Readers take us through the retro keyhole



## BIO

**NAME:** Whitney Chavis

**ESTIMATED VALUE:** $26,000

**FAVOURITE CONSOLE:** PlayStation 2

**FAVOURITE GAME:** *Silent Hill* (PlayStation)

Graphic designer Whitney hails from the west coast of the United States and is one of many collectors and gamers who has become fascinated by Konami's famous horror series, *Silent Hill*. "I love videogames with an interesting story," she tells us, "which this series has in spades. Tales about seemingly innocuous places and people with dark secrets is super-fascinating, and I feel *Silent Hill* really handles its sensitive subject matters with a class not often seen in other mature titles." Whitney discovered the world of *Silent Hill* with the release of the very first game way back on the PlayStation in January 1999, but has always been interested in the horror genre. "I'm fascinated by the mystery aspect of the horror genre and just love exploring dark corners to piece together what is going on," she explains, adding famous names such as *The Last Of Us* and *Resident Evil* as some of her favourite videogames.

Shortly after the release of the first *Silent Hill* game, Whitney began collecting general ephemera and games connected to the *Silent Hill* games, and latterly, movies. Containing just over 400 individual items, it includes complete sets of the Gecco *Silent Hill* statues, the US, UK and Japanese game guides and a comprehensive sub-collection of US comics (including retailer-exclusive and variant covers) and Japanese novelizations. It really is an impressive haul. "But there's still a lot more I would love to add," says Whitney, whose spare room is an impressive shrine to the series. "I've been looking for the 2001 Konami Style James jacket for years now but have yet to find it within my price range. I'm also very keen on finding the Japanese *Silent Hill 2* 'Forbidden Poster' which Konami decided to include as a bonus for pre-ordering the game through Konami Style Japan as well as a *Silent Hill* Famitsu poster, but I'm starting to think maybe that was never printed!"

Whitney's favourite game from the series is the original, which also contains her favourite moment from the series, as she explains. "Lisa's death scene from *Silent Hill* is so sad, yet also hauntingly beautiful and Takayoshi Sato's CGI work was also top notch. The *Silent Hill* series is awesome because it doesn't give up its secrets once the game is over and leaves many mysteries open to interpretation. Which is why years later, we fans still have discussions on the meanings of the games." ★

# BACK TO THE NINETIES

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1998

**MAY 1998 – Square starts blasting stuff, Unreal is very real, it all kicks off with Virtua Striker 2, Daytona USA 2 speeds in, Radiant Silvergun blasts away while the Atari old guard appear on Saturn. Richard Burton dusts off his Centipede…**



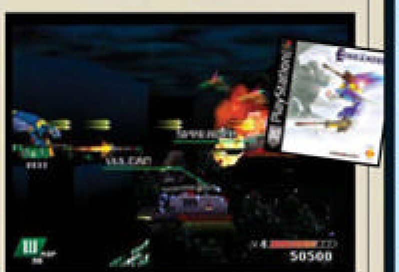

**Although it would be more than two years before its release and a little over a year before** even an official announcement was made, the videogaming rumour mill was working overtime with news that Sony had began development on a follow-up console to its successful PlayStation. This marked the start of the PlayStation 2 hyperbole and conjecture.

In something of a mix up for games developer Squaresoft, *Einhänder* was its first foray into the world of shoot-'em-ups. *Einhänder* was a classic side scrolling shoot-'em-up for PlayStation based around a future war between the inhabitants of Earth and the moon. The 3D graphics for the enemies and the pleasantly constructed backdrops worked well alongside the FMV clips that interspersed key moments in the game.

The gameplay could've been lifted from any one of several games of a similar ilk, yet the atmospheric soundtrack linked the testing gameplay and post apocalyptic scenery well. It also had a few quirks such as branching options for your route and an arsenal of weaponry that was as varied as it was deadly. Despite an overwhelmingly positive reception, its release was restricted to the USA and Japan only.

New this month from GT Interactive was *Unreal*, a first-person shooter available for PC. *Unreal*'s suitably desolate storyline is that of a prison transport spacecraft crashing onto an alien world where the Skaarj, a blood thirsty race, hunt down pretty much anything with a pulse. You are Prisoner 849 and you must make your way through alien temples, castles and the mothership, before locating the Skaarj Queen, doing away with her and making a hasty exit in an escape pod.

*Unreal* featured some eye-popping graphics which offered up an ominous and foreboding mood to the game. While the characters were crisply and precisely defined, the real highlight was the textured backgrounds and surfaces which gave a much more realistic feel than first-person shooters of old. The

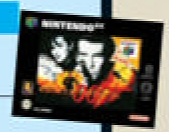


» [PlayStation] Squaresoft tries its hand at scrolling shoot-'em-ups for the first time with outstandingly good results.

## CHARTS

### MAY 1998

**NINTENDO 64**



1. GoldenEye 007 (Nintendo)
2. WCW vs NWO: World Tour (THQ)
3. Super Mario 64 (Nintendo)
4. FIFA '98: The Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
5. Diddy Kong Racing (Nintendo)

**SEGA SATURN**



1. Steep Slope Sliders (Sega)
2. Marvel Super Heroes (Capcom)
3. Duke Nukem 3D (Sega)
4. Resident Evil (Capcom)
5. Winter Heat (Sega)

**PLAYSTATION**

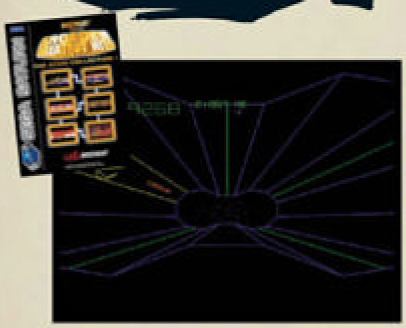



1. Die Hard Trilogy: Platinum (Electronic Arts)
2. WipeOut 2097: Platinum (Psygnosis)
3. Micro Machines V3: Platinum (Codemasters)
4. FIFA '98: The Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
5. Destruction Derby 2: Platinum (Psygnosis)

**MUSIC**




1. Under The Bridge/Lady Marmalade (All Saints)
2. Feel It (Tamperer Featuring Maya)
3. Turn Back Time (Aqua)
4. Gone Till November (Wyclef Jean)
5. Stranded (Lutricia McNeal)



» [Sega Saturn] Old school is given a new lease of life with *Missile Command* and *Tempest* receiving a new audience.

## THIS MONTH IN…

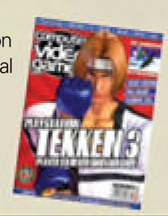
### OFFICIAL SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE

*OSSM* said that Sega's new console, the Katana/Dreamcast, was spotted in dev kit form at software houses across the world. The word was that, "Katana's the first system that will match and even out perform contemporary arcade hardware."



### COMPUTER & VIDEOGAMES

*C&VG* told us about Nintendo celebrating the first anniversary of the N64 being available in Europe by releasing a limited edition N64 complete with a real plastic gold controller. They were limited to a mere 60,000 units priced at £99.99 a pop.




### CU AMIGA

Among the blitters and shareware catalogues stood a feature on text adventures. While this now niche genre rarely had games coverage, a history along with some interesting Amiga adventure suggestions stood out. Get coat, open door, run away, go pub.





» [PC] FPS *Unreal* arrives as does the *Unreal Engine* which is utilised for all manner of games going forward.



» [Arcade] If you enjoyed *Daytona USA 2* then wait a couple months for the the updated *Power Edition*.

lighting system was also beautifully executed, bringing an alien world to life and enhancing your immersion into a game that felt more RPG than FPS.

While the gameplay was standard, an exotic selection of weapons helped lift proceedings. These included the Razorjack, which propelled rotating blades at your target; or the oozy goodness of the Bio Rifle, which spewed toxic stickiness. Critics dismissed *Unreal* as having good graphics but lacked the depth of gameplay to back it up. The game sold well and, as a result, many expansion packs and sequels followed.

No doubt buoyed with the forthcoming FIFA World Cup, there were two new coin-op cabinets with a football flavour. SNK had *Neo-Geo Cup '98*: *The Road To Victory*, an adequate game at best, being a rehash of another SNK football game, *Super Sidekick 3*. It was hampered by its stilted graphics and annoying kicking sound effects. Also, the lack of an official licence meant all player names had to be altered, often with comical results. In opposition was *Virtua Striker 2 Version 98* released by Sega and that wasn't much better with its even dodgier sound effects and frustrating gameplay.

Next up it was the turn of coin-op racers with the excellent *Daytona 2 USA: Battle On The Edge*, the follow up to massively successful original 1993 coin-op release which had been the debut release on Sega's Model 2 system board. With Model 3 now the norm, *Daytona 2* benefited from the extra hardware power injection with some lovely graphics and a much smoother gaming experience.

SNK's arcade racing offering was *Xtreme Rally* aka *Off Beat Racer*. In a very similar vein to *Sega Rally*, you would compete against other drivers for ranking points all in glorious 3D. It was a solid yet unspectacular racing game.

Shoot-'em-up fans were in for a treat with Treasure's vertical scrolling shooter *Radiant Silvergun* hitting arcades this month. A potted summary of the games storyline sees the world end and it's down to you, the sole survivor (obviously), to turn this disappointing start to the day around in your starfighter, the Radiant Silvergun.

You must travel back in time to undo this apocalyptic nonsense by destroying the swarming enemies in various time periods/stages throughout history. The sheer number of enemies made things difficult but they also shot a ridiculous amount of weaponry at you at a sluggish pace resulting in a screen absolutely stuffed full of fire power testing both your piloting skills and trigger finger. Your ultimate goal is to find the alien known as The Origin, kill him and all will be put right.

Visually it was superb with intricate sprite design and inventive bosses.



## MAY WORLD NEWS

14 May saw the very first episode of the comedy claymation series, *Celebrity Deathmatch,* air on MTV. It pitted plasticine animated celebrities against each other in a wrestling ring with usually gory dismembered results. It lasted for a rather impressive six series spanning nine years and 93 episodes.

The same day also marked the passing of the singer and actor Frank Sinatra who died of a heart attack aged 82. He was one of the most popular singers in history having sold a reported 150 million albums and is remembered for songs such as *My Way* and *Come Fly With Me*.

15 May saw the worldwide premiere of *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas* at the Cannes Film Festival. Directed by Terry Gilliam and based on the acclaimed book by Hunter S. Thompson, it follows the escapades of a bonkers journalist and a mad lawyer travelling to Las Vegas while encountering some drug-induced trippiness on the way.

18 May saw a monster-sized blockbuster with the premiere of *Godzilla* starring Matthew Broderick and Jean Reno. There were lots of big footprints, screamy shouty people pointing and running away and Reno doing an Elvis impersonation while Manhattan is wasted by the giant-sized lizard.

26 May saw a 23-year-old chap called Bear Grylls become the youngest British climber to reach the summit of Mount Everest. Bear went onto to become the man who drank his own urine on national TV.

Unusually for a game of this genre there are no power-ups as you're given the full quota of weaponry from the start, then you must utilise each according to type of enemy meaning that weapon choice plays a role. While there are no new weapons to obtain, your existing arsenal can be increased in potency as enemies are defeated.

*Radiant Silvergun* never escaped from the arcades of Japan but Sega confirmed a Saturn conversion would be available. It then kicked us in the hairy saddlebags by making that a Japanese only release too. Gah.

Worldwide Sega Saturn owners were catered for with the release of *Arcade's Greatest Hits*, a retro gaming lesson in the early days of Atari coin-ops. In the polygon encrusted, texture mapped world of modern gaming, a backward glance to the simpler days when gameplay was king was welcome. Six of Atari's best, well, five and *Super Breakout*, were available to a new generation of graphically spoilt gamers. Gamers prepared to be dazzled by *Tempest*, *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Battlezone* and *Missile Command*. ✱




» [Arcade] Top drawer arcade blasting action arrives in the arcades of Japan… and it pretty much stays there.

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL




# Pro Wrestling

"TO ALL MY LITTLE HULKAMANIACS, SAY YOUR PRAYERS, TAKE YOUR VITAMINS"

#88

» TRY COMPANY » NES » 1987

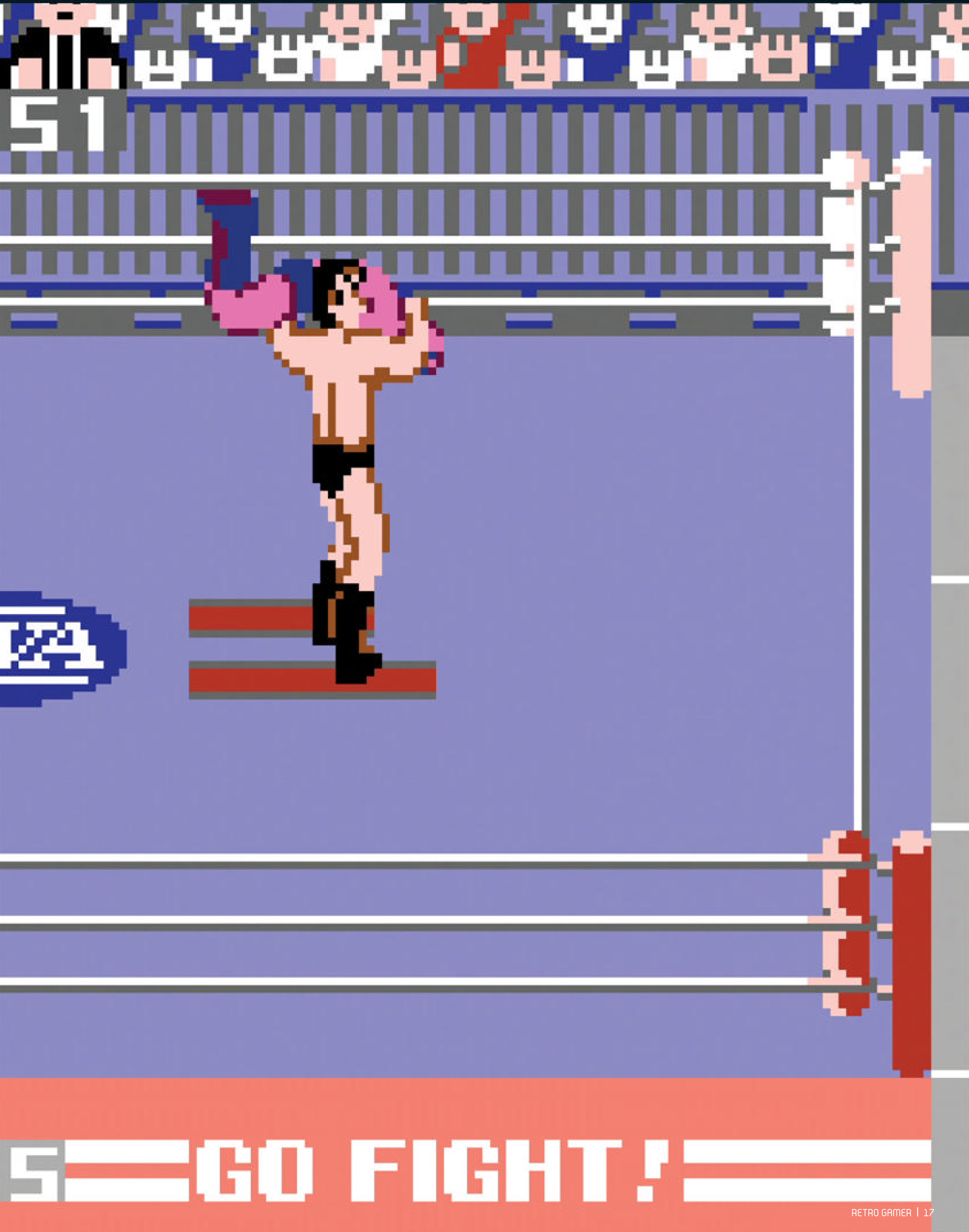
**Back as a youth, I recall (as I hope most of us can) the full-contact wrestling matches against siblings and the inevitable crash of your parents' framed family photo slamming into the ground that followed them. But what propagated this urge to engage in headlocks and suplexes? WWF can obviously be attributable, but the once a week televised battle royale was not sufficient to warrant such a sustainable ruckus. *Something* had to keep this desire for DDTs burning between Sundays.**

In our house, Nintendo's *Pro Wrestling* did the trick. Match after match of body slams, piledrivers and suplexes abounded the screen as two fighters beat the living snot out of one another. While the names were odd, such as Kin Corn Karn and King Slender, the gameplay was not. Simple combinations of the D-pad and button mashing resulted in well executed wrestling moves. On a similar note, attempting a dramatic move too early in the battle would result in an embarrassing failed attempt of that move and, usually, a reversal of the attack on the player.

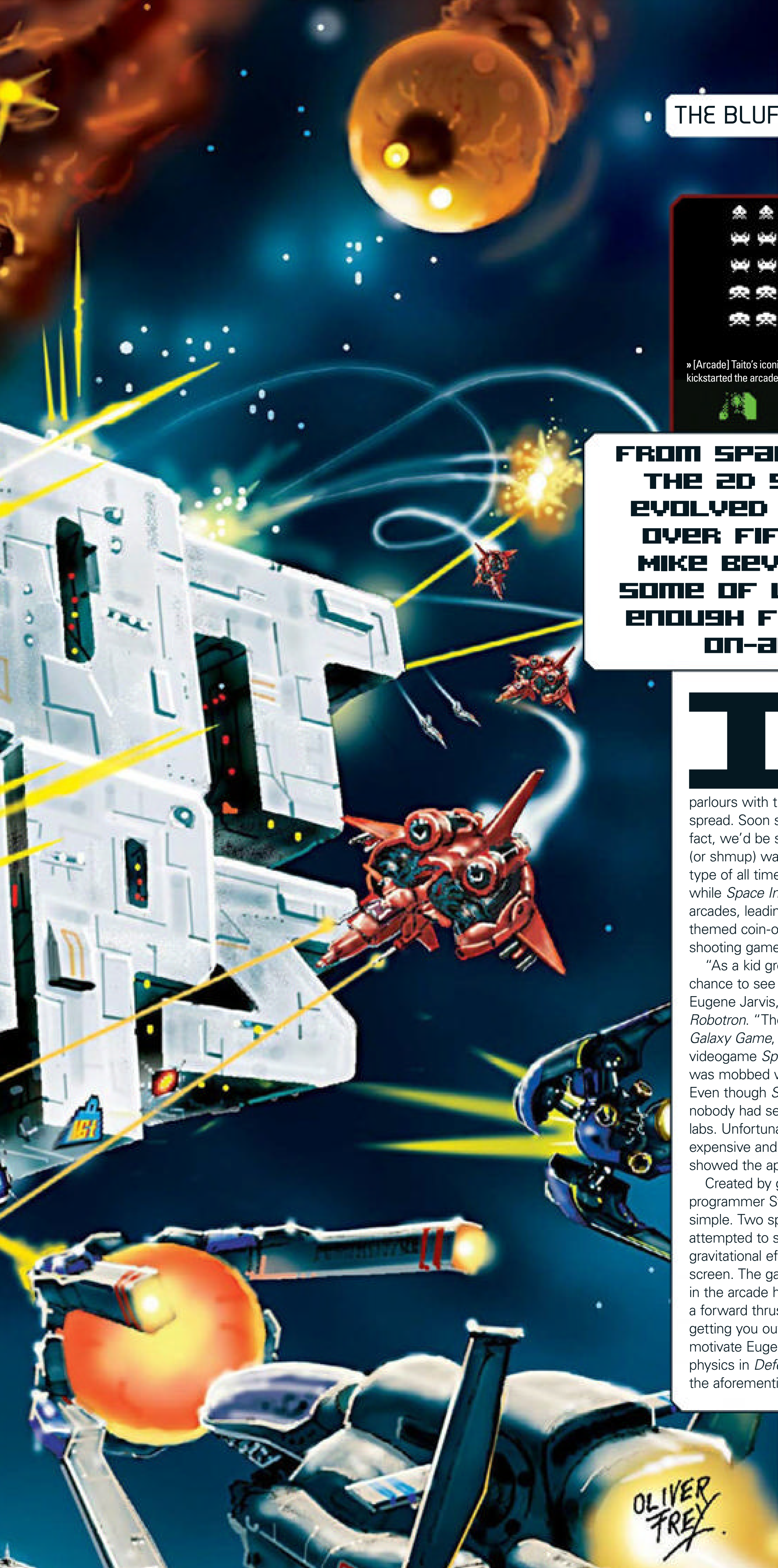
Nice features that set this game apart during the early days of Nintendo gaming included the addition of fighting outside the ring, over the top leaps onto a downed opponent on the concrete, and 'off-the-top-turnbuckle' attacks. Moreover, the simple inclusion of two signature moves for each wrestler that are based upon 'good' and 'evil' player characteristics help beef up the game experience. The added montage of having two belts and an extra character named Great Puma that can perform all the attacks helps complete the game.

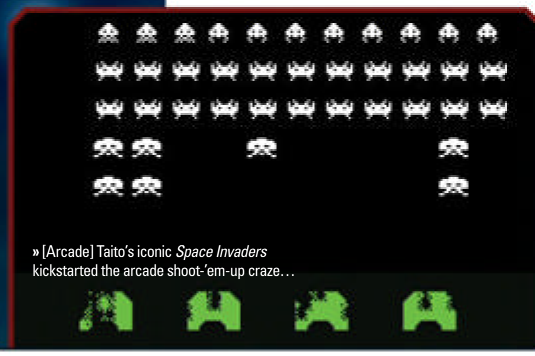
In the end, this game, even with all the odd misspellings such as "A Winner Is You", offered a great break for my parents furniture and carried hours of enjoyment without the unnecessary bruising and smashed sofas.

**ROB MESCOLOTTO**


GO FIGHT!


THE Bluffer's guide TO



» [Arcade] Taito's iconic *Space Invaders* kickstarted the arcade shoot-'em-up craze…

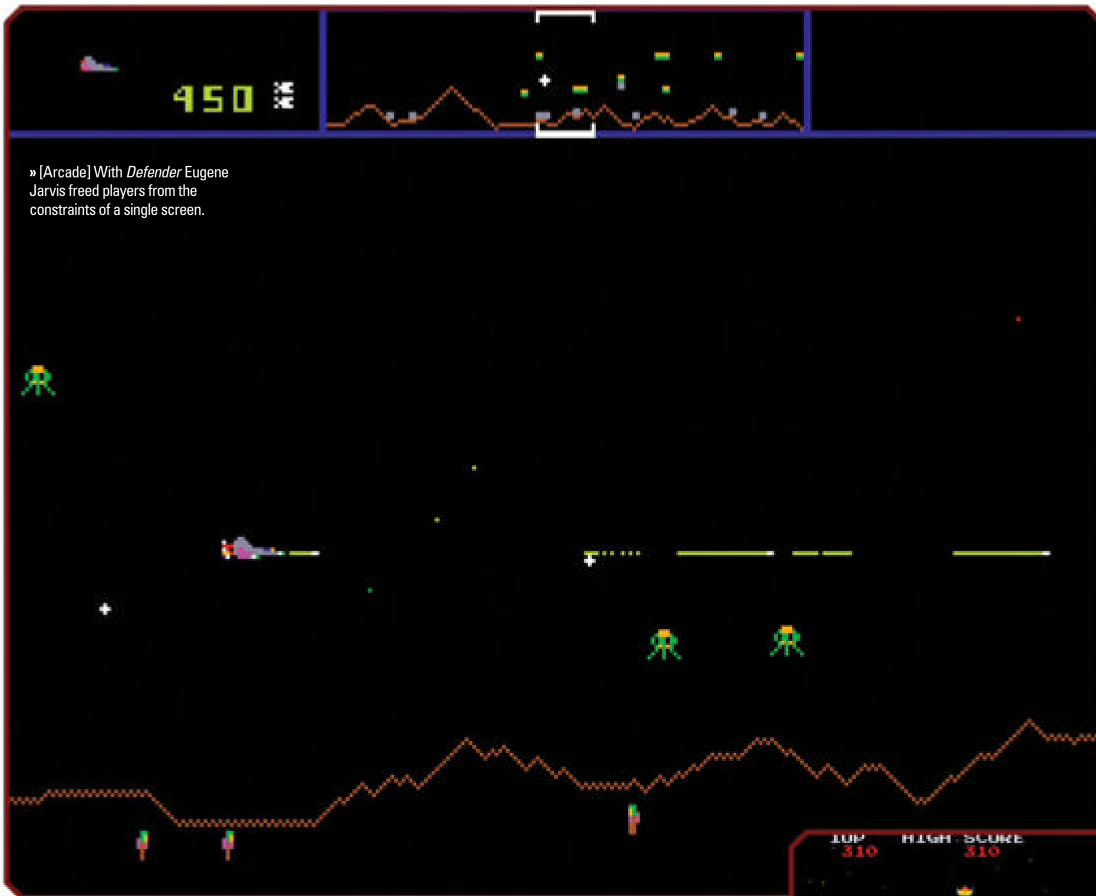
# From Spacewar to Resogun, the 2D shoot-'em-up has evolved and endured for over fifty three years. Mike Bevan examines why some of us still can't get enough frantic spaceship-on-alien action…

**It started with a heartbeat thump. Rows of pixellated aliens shifting slowly down arcade monitors across the globe. Landing first in Japan, replacing the familiar Pachinko** parlours with their unearthly glow, their influence spread. Soon shoot-'em-ups were everywhere. In fact, we'd be surprised if the humble shoot-'em-up (or shmup) wasn't the most numerous videogame type of all time, as well as one of the oldest. And while *Space Invaders* popularised the genre in the arcades, leading to a slew of Earth-vs-extra-terrestrial themed coin-ops and clones, the origins of the 2D shooting game genre go back even further.

"As a kid growing up in Silicon Valley, I had a chance to see some pretty cool stuff," recalls Eugene Jarvis, celebrated designer of *Defender* and *Robotron*. "The first shoot-'em-up I saw was the *Galaxy Game*, a coin-op rendition of the pioneering videogame *Spacewar* back in 1971 at Stanford. It was mobbed with players at ten cents a game… Even though *Spacewar* was created in 1962, nobody had seen it outside of computer research labs. Unfortunately the *Galaxy Game* proved too expensive and unreliable to commercialise but it showed the appeal of the classic shoot-'em-up."

Created by group of MIT students led by programmer Steve Russell, *Spacewar*'s concept was simple. Two spaceships, each controlled by a player, attempted to shoot each other while countering the gravitational effects of a star in the centre of the screen. The game used a system later made famous in the arcade hit, *Asteroids*, with rotational controls, a forward thrust toggle and a 'hyperspace' key for getting you out of sticky situations. The game would motivate Eugene's inclusion of momentum and other physics in *Defender*, along with Atari coin-ops such as the aforementioned *Asteroids*, as well as *Gravitar*. ▶

Bluffer's guide




» [Arcade] With *Defender* Eugene Jarvis freed players from the constraints of a single screen.

# KNOW YOUR SHOOT-'EM-UP GAMES

### SHMUP
■ A popular term for a traditional 2D shoot-'em-up popularly used by UK Commodore 64 review magazine *Zzap!64*, and it is now used by fans worldwide.

### FIXED-SCREEN SHOOT-'EM-UP
■ Shoot-'em-ups that take place on a single screen without any scrolling. Most early shooters, such as *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian* were of this type.

### SCROLLING SHOOT-'EM-UP
■ Advanced shmups use scrolling to give the feeling of travelling across a large game world, be it vertically, horizontally, or multi-directionally.

### TWIN-STICK SHOOTER
■ Games where the player can aim and shoot using a second joystick. Pioneered by games like *Robotron*, this genre has become popular on modern consoles.

### RUN-AND-GUN
■ A sub-genre of shooter usually involving a character moving on foot and shooting at enemies. Examples include *Commando* and *Outzone*.

### POWER-UP
■ A mainstay feature of modern shmups, the power-up is usually a collectable that increases the player's firepower or adds specific new weapon types.

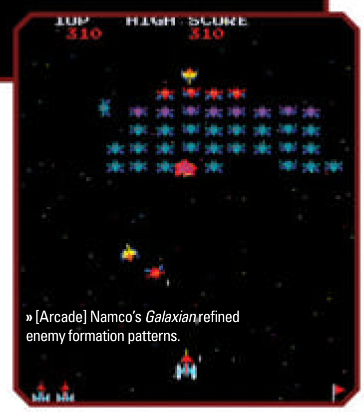
### BULLET-HELL SHOOTER
■ A variant of shooting games, typified by the work of Japanese companies such as Cave, where curtains of enemy bullets make survival literally hellish.

### MULTIPLIER
■ A feature seen in bullet-hell games like *DoDonPachi* where killing lots of enemies quickly in a short space of time creates massive scoring opportunities.

### TIME-ATTACK
■ A game mode present in some shmups where players have to score as many points as possible against the clock to top the leaderboard.

▶ But it was *Space Invaders*' simple concept of a lone craft spewing projectiles at a formation of descending targets that became the template for the first wave of shoot-'em-ups. Along with *Space Invaders* manufacturer, Taito, many well-known arcade producers got early starts in the shooter gold rush of the late Seventies and early Eighties. Data East's *Astro Fighter* presented rigid formations of enemy ships attacking the player, it also applied a scrolling starfield and a palette of 16 colours, as opposed to *Space Invaders*' monochrome visuals. Better still was Namco's *Galaxian*, which doubled the amount of onscreen colours and featured enemies that would break from their formation and dive bomb towards the player's ship.

"I was scared of *Space Invaders* machines," chuckles Malcolm 'Malc' Laurie, creator of the shooter website shmups.com. "I didn't know what they were all about, and all the big boys were usually at them. Along came *Galaxian* and I shoved my way to the front and inserted my coin, then I was hooked. These colourful enemies actually swooped and attacked, and it just made perfect sense. How simple can you get? Shoot the baddies before they shoot you. Left, right, fire. It was all about your tight reactions and split-second decisions, and every time I left the machine I felt a real rush and wanted more action."




» [Arcade] Namco's *Galaxian* refined enemy formation patterns.

Similar space-themed coin-ops like Nintendo's *Space Firebird,* Nichibutsu's *Moon Cresta* and SNK's arcade debut, *Ozma Wars*, featured increasingly complex attack patterns, pre-empting those seen in later, more sophisticated shooting games. With enemies following unpredictable curving trajectories, these titles were more varied and challenging, taking players by surprise when a cunning alien swung back on them from off of the screen. Perhaps the best example of this first batch of swirly attack-wave shooters was Namco's *Galaga*. Alongside *Moon Cresta*, which gave players the chance to dock

# SELECTED TIMELINE

**1962 — SPACEWAR**
■ This two-player game for the PDP-1 is arguably the earliest example of the genre.

**1978 — SPACE INVADERS**
■ The granddaddy of the traditional shoot-'em-up, *Space Invaders* introduced many gamers to blasting aliens.

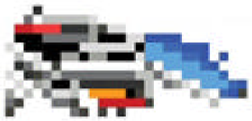
**1980 — PHOENIX**
■ Featuring birds in space, *Phoenix* brought us one of the earliest videogame bosses with its mothership.

**1980 — DEFENDER**
■ A genre-changing shoot-'em-up, *Defender* allowed players to fly in two directions across a scrolling landscape whilst blasting aliens.

**1982 — ROBOTRON: 2084**
■ Eugene Jarvis pioneered the twin-stick shooter with this robot blaster.

**1982 — XEVIOUS**
■ This shmup pioneered ground and air-based enemy formations.

1981



# FIVE ESSENTIAL GAMES

Our pick of some of the greatest and most influential shoot-'em-ups ever devised.



## GRADIUS

■ 1985 ■ Arcade, Various

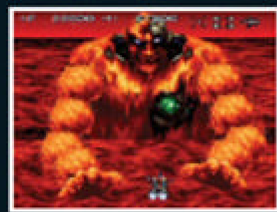
This Konami shooter enabled players to build up their ship's arsenal using a weapon select bar at the bottom of the screen. Piloting a tooled up ship with missiles, lasers and the iconic 'multiples' gave you a warm glow of destructive enjoyment, a feeling recaptured in its spin-off, *Salamander*, as well as its sequels.



## R-TYPE

■ 1987 ■ Arcade, Various

The start of another flagship shooter franchise, *R-Type*'s H.R. Giger-inspired visuals and unique detachable Force Orb power-up went on to influence scores of later horizontal-scrolling shmups. Its bio-organic enemies and bosses were exquisitely realised, plus who could forget their first encounter with the enormous green Bydo mothership on stage three?



## AXELAY

■ 1992 ■ SNES

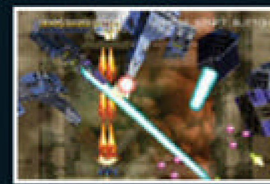
With some of the best visuals seen in a console shmup, as well as one of the meanest looking hero spaceships, *Axelay* took the vertical and horizontal scrolling structure of *Salamander* and ran with it to create a SNES classic. It's power up and weapon system was sublime, and its enormous bosses rivalled anything seen in the arcades at the time.



## DODONPACHI

■ 1997 ■ Arcade, Saturn, PSOne

The game that truly defined the modern bullet-hell shmup, *DoDonPachi* improved the combo multiplier system of it predecessor, *DonPachi*, to create an epic score-oriented shooter. Inspiring a long-running franchise from manufacturer Cave, it influenced most future manic-score releases and remains one of the most revered titles in their back catalogue.



## RADIANT SILVERGUN

■ 1998 ■ Arcade, Saturn, Xbox 360

Starting out as an arcade game before making it onto the Sega Saturn, Treasure's magnificent shooter was inspired by Irem's *Image Fight*, bringing next-gen visuals and stunning 3D effects into the mix. With its colour-based score-chaining mechanic, complex weapon-system and many secrets, it's a timeless, endlessly revisitable game.

ships together and increase their firepower, *Galaga* introduced one of the earliest examples of a 'power-up'. A alien could capture your craft in a tractor beam and take it to the top of the screen, but if you had another life it was possible to free it, link up two spaceships and double your onscreen munitions.



**Centuri's *Pheonix* and Midway's *Gorf* were notable for including the earliest examples of shoot-'em-up 'bosses' in the form of huge** motherships, along with distinctly different stages (in *Gorf*'s case including direct clones of *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian*). But while most of the early games took place on a fixed screen, often with a pretty moving starry backdrop, a few arcade titles started to introduce playfields that scrolled upwards or sideways, or even both. One of the first was the hugely influential and revered *Defender*, which was a massive leap in visual, technical and gameplay terms from *Space Invaders* which arrived just two years earlier. "I wanted to do a game that broke new ground," says its creator, Eugene Jarvis. "I love the emotional aspect of gaming, challenging the player's instincts in an intuitive way. So the expanded universe of multiple scrolling screens provided both

> **"I was scared of Space Invaders machines, I didn't know what they were all about"**
> Malcolm Laurie

depth of gameplay and it was a real adrenaline rush to fly around the planet at insane speeds!

"It added a real physical twitch factor, challenging motor skills with flight path navigation and simultaneous aiming and shooting, and at the same time, it added tactics and strategy in rescuing and protecting the astronauts on the ground from the enemy assault. It was originally just a unidirectional scroller with a wrap-around world, but after playing it a bit it was a real bummer to have to fly around the entire world to go back and get something you missed, so we kicked the reverse button in, and the playability increased exponentially." Another feature that *Defender* popularised was the screen clearing 'Smart Bomb.' "There was a big deal about new smart military weapons coming online back in the late Seventies," says Eugene. "I tried implementing a true Smart Bomb that would surgically remove the most threatening enemy. Problem was, it wasn't ▶



» [Arcade] *Phoenix* brought us this… one of the first ever videogame bosses.

**1983 — GYRUSS**
■ A timeless shooter from Konami with a pounding soundtrack that was based on Bach.

**1984 — DROPZONE**
■ Released for Atari 8-bit and C64 computers, Archer Maclean's glorious take on *Defender* was one of the best home shooters of its time.

**1985 — URIDIUM**
■ Like *Dropzone*, this C64 release was one of the first home shooters to mirror the action of arcade games.

**1986 — SIDE ARMS**
■ Capcom's excellent scrolling shmup allowed players to shoot left or right using separate fire buttons.

**1987 — WIZBALL**
■ Inspired by *Gradius*, this scrolling shooter was an early title from Sensible Software.

**1987 — FLYING SHARK**
■ One of Toaplan's most popular early games, *Flying Shark* was a vertically scrolling biplane-themed shooter that made it to many home platforms.

**1988**

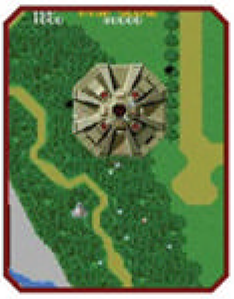
**1989 — XMULTIPLY**
■ This continued Irem's experimental approach to weapon systems by giving players a ship with squid-like tentacles.




» [Arcade] The tricky solar assault stage in *Salamander*.

much fun, and was a lot of work to program. I discovered it was way cooler just to blow everything up, so really the Smart Bomb isn't all that smart!"

Alongside *Defender*, other games that introduced scrolling included Namco's *Xevious*, a vertical shoot-'em-up that laid down a benchmark for future games of its type, Konami's *Scramble*, Sega's *Zaxxon* and SNK's multi-directional *Vanguard*. "I could never play *Defender*," admits veteran games designer Ste Pickford. "There was always a crowd about three people deep surrounding the machine at Stockport arcade, so you had to jostle and wait, and get your 10p down on the machine half an hour in advance, just to get a go. When I did, the number of buttons was so confusing, and the game was so fast, that I just died in about ten seconds flat. So, instead, I'd stand at the back of the crowd and watch the local experts play, marvelling at the way their fingers flashed across the buttons like 100-word-a-minute typists. I much preferred the side-scrolling games with solid floors and ceilings, like *Scramble*, then *Gradius*, and especially *R-Type*. The thing about *R-Type* was that it just felt like the perfect video game when it came out. It played brilliantly, looked amazing, and refined Konami's power-up system. Each level was a new jaw-dropping surprise, and the bosses were just incredible."



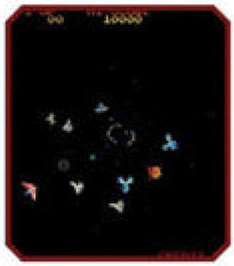
» [Arcade] *Xevious* introduced scrolling backgrounds with ground and aerial targets along with bosses.

## "Jeff Minter's games got me into writing games to start with – I might never have got into writing games"
Andrew Braybrook

Konami's influence on the shoot-'em-up scene was substantial, with the introduction of *Gradius* and *Salamander* alongside its now-familiar weapon-power up sidebars, and quirky but brilliant titles like *Time Pilot*, *Gyruss* and the *Defender*-esque *Juno First*. Other companies that made an impact included Capcom with its *1942* fighter-plane shooting series, Taito with its aquatic-themed *Darius*, and Nichibutsu with *Terra Cresta* and its spinoffs. "I adored *UFO Robo Dangar*," says Malc. "The way you could start with a small ship, and bolt more weapons and parts on, ending up with a massive robot… And that music, driving me on… That style of shooter of course started with *Terra Cresta*. And spotting a shiny new three-screen *Darius*, and spending a whole afternoon lost in its clutches…" New Japanese publishers were emerging that dedicated themselves almost exclusively to designing arcade shoot-'em-ups such as Irem (*R-Type*, *XMultiply*) and Toaplan (*Slap Fight*, *Flying Shark*). Something of a shooter renaissance was happening in the coin-op scene, and also on home computers of the time.

**Andrew Braybrook, coder of the C64 shooter *Uridium* remembers his introduction to console shmups. "I bought an Atari 600XL just to play** *Dropzone*, partly for the speed of the game and also the presentation," he recalls. "Jeff Minter's games got me into writing games to start with – if I'd never seen *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* and *Matrix* I might never have got into writing games because I'd not have seen what was possible." In fact it would be impossible to write a feature about shmups without mentioning Jeff. He's been creating stunning shoot-'em-ups at Llamasoft for over 30 years, delivering all sorts of weird brilliance along the way. His knack of taking existing ideas and adding his own quirks to them has one him a deserved legion of fans that adore the Wales-based developer. We'd hate to live in a world without *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* and *TxK*, just as we need *Uridium* in our lives.

"I had played *Defender* and *Space Invaders* but *Uridium* was something else," recalls graphic ▶



» [Arcade] Games like *Tempest* and *Gyruss* (above) gave the impression of shooting into 3D space.



» [Arcade] Konami's *Time Pilot* let players travel in any direction through fluffy parallax clouds.

### RAIDEN
■ An excellent vertical shooter that gave rise to a shooter franchise from manufacturer Seibu Kaihatsu culminating in the excellent *Raiden Fighters* games.

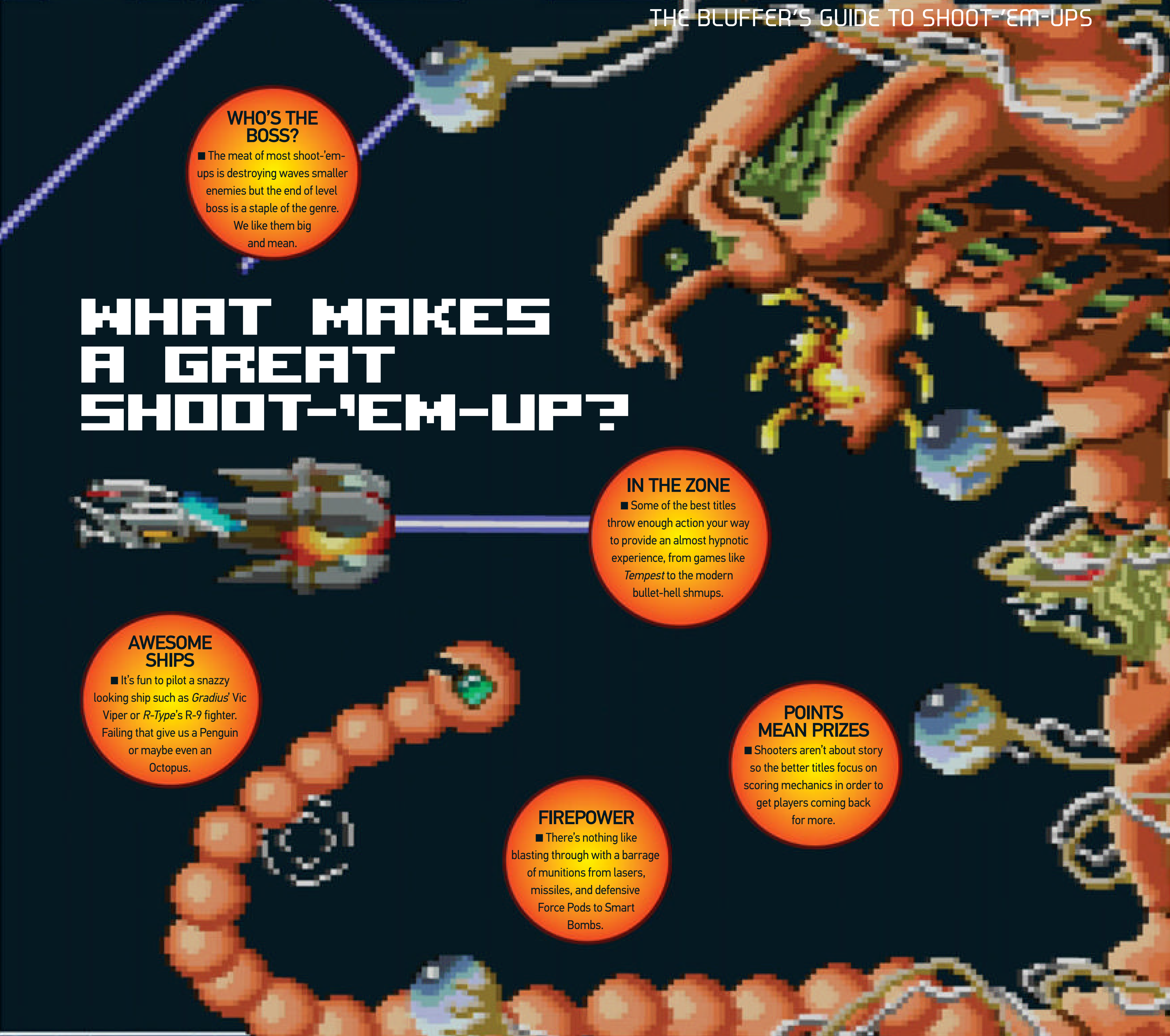
### XEXEX
■ A graphically stunning Konami arcade shooter that integrated elements of the Gradius series with a Force-style weapon system similar to *R-Type*'s.

### PULSTAR
■ This Neo Geo shooter appeared to be much-inspired by *R-Type*, but featured even better looking graphics and similarly rock-hard gameplay.

1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995

### THUNDER FORCE III
■ Often considered the best entry in Techno Soft's Sega Mega Drive shooter series, this game also made it into the arcade in the form of *Thunder Force AC*.

### BATSUGUN
■ Toaplan's final shoot-'em-up give birth to the 'manic' or bullet-hell genre, integrating complex enemy waves and bullet patterns and a smaller player hitbox.



# WHAT MAKES A GREAT SHOOT-'EM-UP?

### WHO'S THE BOSS?

■ The meat of most shoot-'em-ups is destroying waves smaller enemies but the end of level boss is a staple of the genre. We like them big and mean.

### IN THE ZONE

■ Some of the best titles throw enough action your way to provide an almost hypnotic experience, from games like *Tempest* to the modern bullet-hell shmups.

### AWESOME SHIPS

■ It's fun to pilot a snazzy looking ship such as *Gradius*' Vic Viper or *R-Type*'s R-9 fighter. Failing that give us a Penguin or maybe even an Octopus.

### POINTS MEAN PRIZES

■ Shooters aren't about story so the better titles focus on scoring mechanics in order to get players coming back for more.

### FIREPOWER

■ There's nothing like blasting through with a barrage of munitions from lasers, missiles, and defensive Force Pods to Smart Bombs.

### RAYSTORM

■ One of the first shooters to feature 3D polygon-graphics, this was the sequel to Taito's *RayForce*, a game that introduced an innovative lock-on laser mechanic.

1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002

### EINHÄNDER

■ One of the first 3D console shooters, Squaresoft's PlayStation shmup had an ingenious weapon system built around collecting and using various gunpod power-ups.

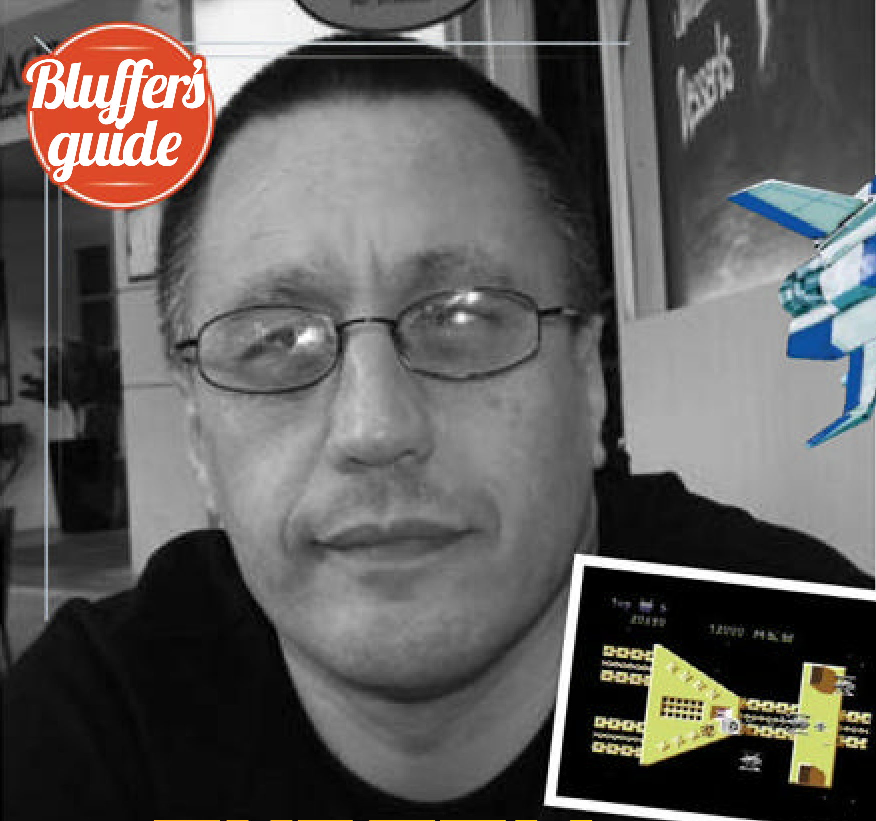
### BLAZING STAR

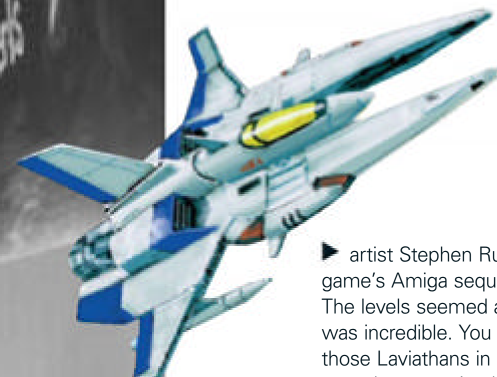
■ This sequel to *Pulstar* had a more score-oriented approach with a multiplier system, and a button-hammering weapon system.

### IKARUGA

■ The sequel to *Radiant Silvergun* implemented a colour-switching mechanic allowing players to absorb enemy bullets and unleash a fierce screen-clearing counter.

Bluffer's guide





# ANDREW BRAYBROOK

**We chat to the creator of the best-selling Commodore 64 shoot-'em-up, Uridium**

**What are your early memories of encountering shoot-'em-up games in the arcades?**
I was still at school and there was a cool bar nearby that had videogames in it, starting with a vector game that was based on *Star Trek*, and they added a *Space Invaders* machine later on. We would go there at lunchtime and have a coke each and play the games. That would have been 1978 or 1979.

**Did you have any favourites, or ones which perhaps inspired you to create your own games?**
I think it's reasonable to say that we loved them all, from *Asteroids*, *Scramble* and *Galaxian* to the later *Slap Fight* and *Space Harrier*. The graphical look of *Star Force* certainly inspired the look of *Uridium*, from the colour scheme to the shapes.

**Do you think early home computers lent themselves well to emulating arcade-like shooting games?**
The C64 had characters and sprites, rather like the arcade machines of the time, except that the arcade machines had a lot more colours and a lot more sprites. By the time the Amiga came along we had the colours of the arcade machines but not the sprites. We knew we were chasing better hardware on the arcade machines all the time.

**What features do you think make for a truly great shoot-'em-up game?**
You need plenty of bullets, a generous collision-detection system, some really nice power-ups to just tip the balance in your favour, and some moments to catch a breather. Not having enemies that mindlessly crash into you is also good… I prefer to have fire-fights with the enemy rather than have them just try to run into me. I'm not a great fan of end of level bosses either, as they tend to be rather restrictive as they take up much of the screen space, and unless you're well powered up you won't beat them. I also prefer games to not play exactly the same every time. *Dropzone* on the Atari is certainly a game I played a lot of and fits most of the criteria.

**Why do you think there were so many shoot-'em-up games produced in the Eighties and Nineties, many that were incredibly popular?**
It's a nice simple concept and easy to get into, with any number of directional possibilities and scenarios. The kill or be killed scenario is quite timeless.

▶ artist Stephen Rushbrook, who worked on the game's Amiga sequel. "For starters it was mean. The levels seemed absolutely huge and the speed was incredible. You flashed over the decks of those Laviathans in scant moments. The game was always saying how fast do you dare to go?" Alongside Archer Maclean and his accomplished *Defender* tribute, *Dropzone*, C64 programmer Tony Crowther was also heavily influenced by Eugene Jarvis' baby. "I fell in love with scrolling games, and the C64 was probably the best machine for handling scrolling at 60fps," he says. "*Defender* was a game that I admired, and I think that Steve Evans' version [*Guardian*] by Alligata was the best clone I've seen of it. *Defender* is still influencing games today, just take a look at Sony's *Resogun*."

Sensible Software's *Wizball* was another original scrolling shooter that owed much to classic coin-ops, as did a number of the company's later releases, including a utility that allowed users to create shooting games of its own. "Back in the Eighties us developers were all heavily inspired by the top arcade machines of the day and the shoot-'em-ups were often leading the way," says Sensible supremo, Jon Hare. "Games such as *Nemesis (Gradius)* and *Salamander* heavily shaped our early work on *Wizball*. *Galax-i-Birds* was essentially a budget game that we managed to sling together in about a week between *Parallax* and *Wizball* as a bit of light relief, it was basically a piss-take based on *Galaxian*… Aside from the Shoot-'em-up Construction Kit, our other adventure into the world of shoot-'em-ups was the




» [Arcade] A fully tooled up tentacle-fighter in Irem's *XMultiply*.

**BORDER DOWN**
■ The arcade debut of G.rev, a company formed by ex-Taito employees, *Border Down* was one of the best shmups to make it onto Sega's Dreamcast console.

2003 — 2004 — 2005 — 2006 — 2007

**DEATHSMILES**
■ Along with *Akai Katana* and *DoDonPachi Resurrection* this was one of a handful of recent Cave titles to be published in the West, courtesy of Rising Star Games.




» [Arcade] The rare arcade sequel *R-Type Leo* introduced co-op play to the series.

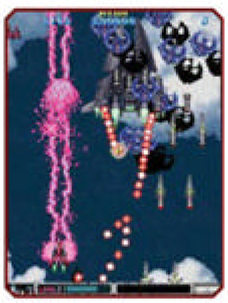


» [PC Engine] *Gunhed* (aka *Blazing Lasers*) was one of many exceptional PC Engine blasters.



» [Arcade] Japanese coin-op manufacturer ,Toaplan, was famous for shoot-'em-ups like *Flying Shark*.

**"We were all religiously going to our local arcade and always ended up playing Salamander"**
Robin Levy



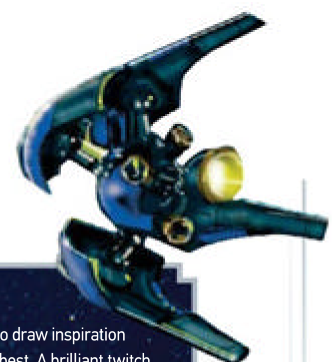
» [Arcade] With its copious pink bullets, *Batsugun* is widely regarded to be the first bullet-hell shooter.

*Defender*-influenced *Insects In Space*, which was our last game for the C64."

Other programmers of C64 games like *IO* and *Armalyte* also express their debt to coin-op shooters by Konami and Irem among others. "The games which had the most influence for *IO* were *Nemesis* (*Gradius*), *Salamander*, *R-Type*, and *Darius*," says programmer Doug Hare. "Relative to the other computers at the time, the C64 was a great platform for writing shoot-'em-ups. The combination of hardware sprites and scrolling as standard made it an absolute joy to work on."

"We were all religiously going to our local arcade and always ended up playing *Salamander*," reveals Robin Levy, graphic artist on *Armalyte*. "We loved the flow and feel, but there were lots of bits from other games that we tried to emulate. *Galaga*-style shooters, in particular, the way the player can wipe out an entire wave of enemies in a sweet spot, and *Nemesis*, just because it was the first real example we saw of upgrades and mothership bosses. One of the things we liked about the Konami shooters was the visual clue that if you could shoot through a gap you could move through it, this also meant that the player collision was smaller than the actual player sprite – something that bullet-hell shooters do now. *R-Type*'s influence was predominantly visual as we only saw it in magazines. For single player, we had an extra sprite; we liked the multiples in *Nemesis* and *Salamander* and saw screenshots of the Force in *R-Type and* so our 'Remote' was born."

**But what was it that made for an addictive and enjoyable shoot-'em-up? "For me, it's all about the feel," says Malc. "Being in perfect control** of your ship, becoming fully tooled up, and wreaking havoc all around, whilst dodging waves of incoming baddies and bullets. I've got fond memories of playing *Vulcan Venture* [*Gradius II*] in arcades, twirling my four multiples around and spitting hot death, Konami tunes blasting, avoiding the viciously jaggy scenery and hoping that invincible buzz would last long as I could hang on to the joystick. Shoot- ▶



2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014

**SINE MORA** (2012)
■ A side-scrolling bullet-hell shooter from Japanese developer Grasshopper, *Sine Mora* featured a time-rewinding mechanic similar to those seen in racing games.

**RESOGUN** (2014)
■ From *Super Stardust* developer Housemarque, the *Defender*-inspired *Resogun* is possibly the most technically advanced shoot-'em-up ever created.

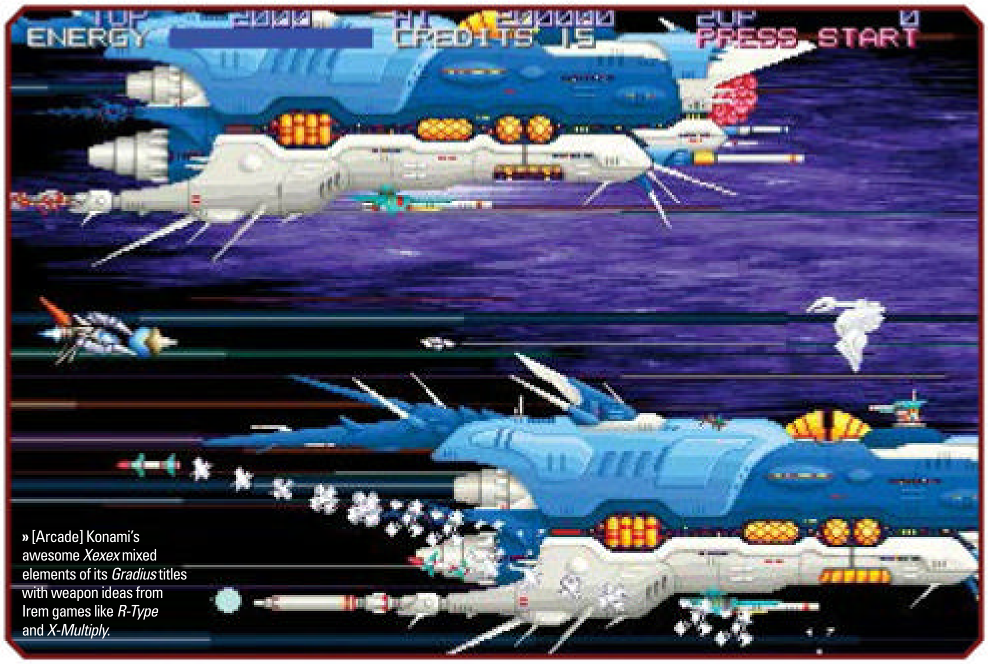
**TXK** (2014)
■ This isn't the first game of Jeff's to draw inspiration from *Tempest*, but it's arguably his best. A brilliant twitch shooter that every PS Vita own needs to play.

Bluffer's guide

## ARMADA OF ANNIHILATION

Some of the funkiest spaceships in the world of shmups



» [Arcade] Konami's awesome *Xexex* mixed elements of its *Gradius* titles with weapon ideas from Irem games like *R-Type* and *X-Multiply*.

'em-ups are visceral beasts and cause worrying palpitations at their best. The fear of death and having to restart way back is a gameplay feature I miss in modern games that you can just waltz through."

**At this point shoot-'em-ups were diverging into a number of sub-genres including twin-stick shooters like *Robotron* and *Smash TV*,** run-and-gun games with human protagonists like *Commando* and *Ikari Warriors*, and 3D-style games such as *Tempest* and *Space Harrier*. The colourful 'cute-'em-up', typified by *Parodius*, *Twinbee* and *Fantasy Zone* showed that shmups needn't be restricted to moody space vistas and lone starfighters battling to save the Earth. New consoles like the SNES, PC-Engine, Neo-Geo and Sega Saturn gave us brilliant home versions of the likes of *R-Type*, *UN Squadron*, *Gradius 3* and *Battle Garegga* along with original blasters like *Super Star Soldier*, *Pulstar* and *Radiant Silvergun*. New 3D graphics technology allowed for polygon blasters like *R-Type Delta* and *Raystorm* on machines like the PlayStation, and with a little-known *Toaplan* shooter called *Batsugun*, a new evolution of the classic 2D shooter was born – the bullet-hell shoot-'em-up.

Two new Japanese companies, Raizing (producers of *Battle Garegga*) and Cave (creators of *DoDonPachi* and *Progear*) formed from ex-Toaplan staff in the mid-nineties to bring us a third-generation of arcade shmups featuring intricate graphics, deep scoring mechanics and lots of bullets. Today Cave remains one of the last surviving manufacturers dedicated to the classic 2D shooting game with recent arcade and console releases like *Deathsmiles* and *Akai Katana*. "I love bullet-hell shooters but Cave lost its way latterly," laments Malc. "Pink lasers and Loli do absolutely nothing for me, and that's what ruined its latest titles, together with a degree of gameplay stagnation. However, in its heyday, with the likes of *Dangun Feveron*, *DoDonPachi*, and the mighty *Guwange*, they were unbeatable in that Cave was not afraid to innovate in its games. I do like my manic shooters, but I probably prefer more considered and tactical efforts like you see in *R-Type*, or single screeners like the often-overlooked *Gaplus*."

However, it was arguably in the arcades, where they began, that shoot-'em-ups carved many of the happiest memories for many fans. "The way you could breeze in, and leave a high score and walk out again, arcades made it all about the competition with the others that were there," says Malc. "Playing with friends, meeting up to see what the latest game was… the day that *Salamander* arrived was really special. Ten strangers queuing up excitedly and working out strategies together… Consider the physicality of joysticks and huge cabinets to wrestle with – that's a big loss when becoming intimate with a shmup on a modern console."

"The shoot-'em-up genre was a natural for the early development of videogaming," says Eugene Jarvis. "The elements of trajectory and collision and life and death were very basic and easy to communicate to the player with primitive graphics. The most basic instinct of

> **"The shoot-'em-up genre was a natural for the early development of gaming"**
> Eugene Jarvis


» [PlayStation 4] The amount of pixels that the recent *Resogun* shifts about is quite astounding…



life is survival. Shooter games tapped into this most important primal drive – the fight or flight, kill or be killed instinct. Of course in the last few decades the classic 2D shooter gave birth to its 3D counterparts. *Doom* pioneered the first-person shooter genre so omnipresent in today's gaming scene. Starting with the primitive tank shooting games of the Seventies, we now have *World Of Tanks* and other amazing 3D sims. But like the ancestral rat which started the massive diaspora of mammals we see today, the classic third-person 2D shoot-'em-up remains virtually unkillable, the twin-stick variant being particularly very much alive in today's gaming scene." As we go to press Eugene's words are vindicated by the fact that one of the fastest-selling downloadable games on the PlayStation 4 at the is an old-school twin-stick shooting game, *Helldivers*. The golden age of the shoot-'em-up might be over, but it seems like people are still hooked on blowing up space bugs…. *

» [PS Vita] Jeff Minter's most recent game was the superb *TxK*. Sadly, it's no longer heading to other systems.








# JULLIAN RIGNALL

## A chat with the high score king

**You were a UK champion at *Defender* – was this a game that excited you? Do you think it was influential on shoot-'em-ups?**
Yeah. It had a wrap-around scrolling screen which I think was the first of its kind. But what it really showed was just how sophisticated shooter AI could be. The enemies in the game felt distinctive and different, and had their own reason for being there. Baiters – the enemies that would emerge if you took too long to complete a level were particularly difficult to get rid of, and seemed to anticipate your moves. They felt almost lifelike in the way that they behaved - quite an achievement for a game that was from the Eighties.

**Back in the mid-Eighties you could walk into an arcade and play games like *Gyruss, Defender, Nemesis, Salamander*... shoot-'em-ups were everywhere. Do you miss those days?**
Well, the weird thing is that we have a bar in San Francisco that's filled with old arcade games, including several you just listed. So I can go there anytime and play – which is rather nice. But generally, I do miss arcades. There was something to be said about going into a new arcade and seeing something that you'd never played before. Hard to think these days that arcades were where all the cutting edge games were at. Now they're all on home consoles – which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

**In *Zzap!64* you were known for having a loving shoot-'em-ups. What was your favourite shmup?**
*Dropzone* without doubt. What was great about that game is that it was designed around the C64's one button joystick. It was a *Defender* clone, but it wasn't trying to be *Defender*. I still think it's one of the greatest games on that machine.

**What kind of features did you look for when you reviewed a shoot-'em-up in order for it to get a good score?**
It had to be fun first and foremost. Feel of the controls was also important, followed by the AI, the graphics and sound. Ultimately, it was all about the entertainment that it delivered, and whether it was worth the money or not.

**There were loads of shooters on early home computers like the C64, do you think this was a good thing or were there too many?**
There was a period where we'd roll our eyes when yet another shooter arrived at the offices. I remember reviewing tons of them – a lot of them were decent, but not brilliant, and they were always a pain in the arse to write about because you just wouldn't know what to say. You just started to run out of phrases and would have to be creative to try to think of new ways of saying "this is an average shooter." At least with the good ones and the really bad ones you could have fun writing about those. Particularly the bad ones!

**Do you still play any shoot-'em-ups and if so which ones have you tried recently?**
Absolutely! *Helldivers* was one that I reviewed quite recently, and I really enjoyed that. It is a super-tough game, but it's also thoroughly enjoyable. In my advancing years, my reflexes are unfortunately slowing down somewhat, but at least I have years and years of experience to make up for that, so I'm still reasonably decent at playing them!

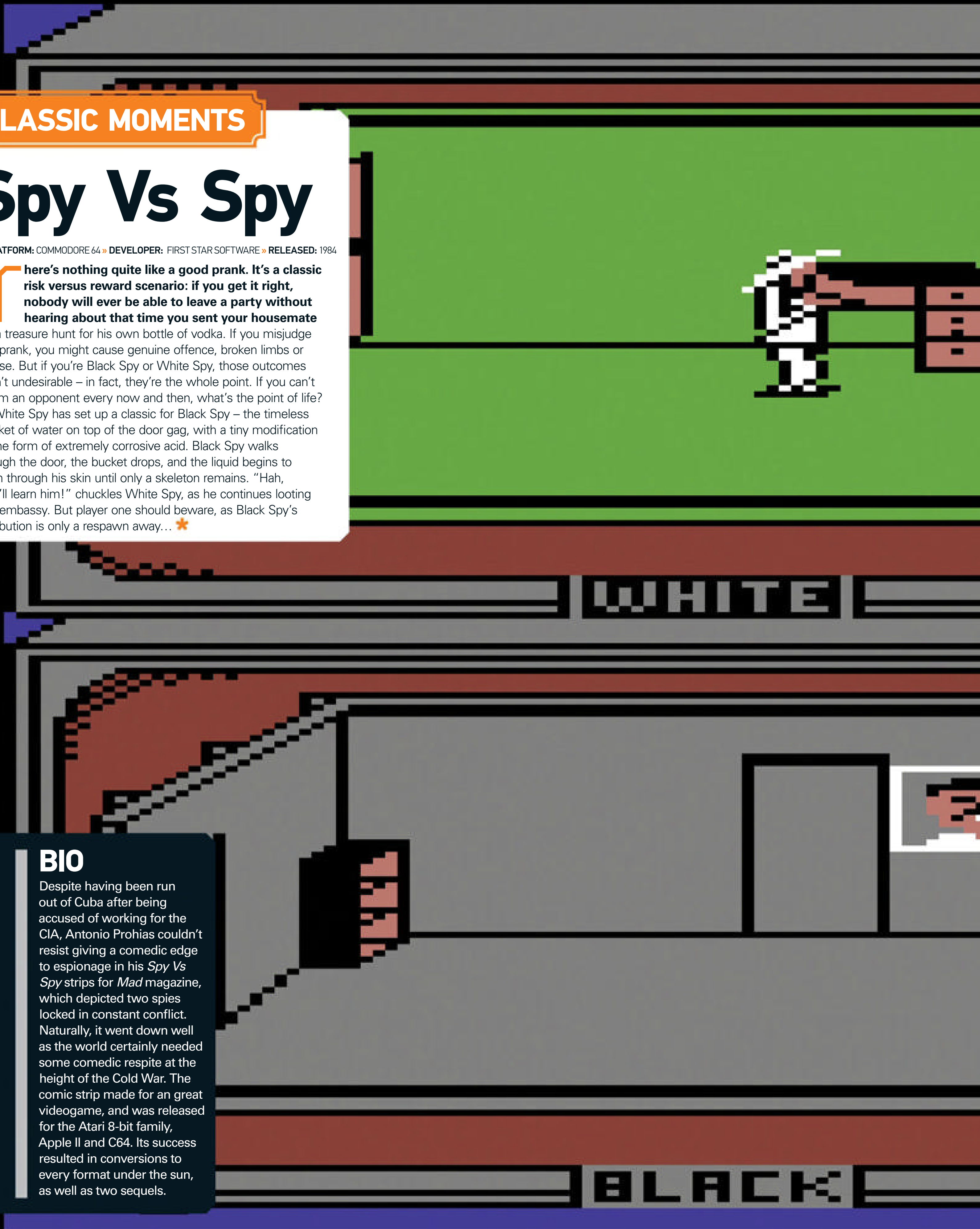
CLASSIC MOMENTS

# Spy Vs Spy

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** FIRST STAR SOFTWARE » **RELEASED:** 1984

**There's nothing quite like a good prank. It's a classic risk versus reward scenario: if you get it right, nobody will ever be able to leave a party without hearing about that time you sent your housemate** on a treasure hunt for his own bottle of vodka. If you misjudge the prank, you might cause genuine offence, broken limbs or worse. But if you're Black Spy or White Spy, those outcomes aren't undesirable – in fact, they're the whole point. If you can't maim an opponent every now and then, what's the point of life?

White Spy has set up a classic for Black Spy – the timeless bucket of water on top of the door gag, with a tiny modification in the form of extremely corrosive acid. Black Spy walks though the door, the bucket drops, and the liquid begins to burn through his skin until only a skeleton remains. "Hah, that'll learn him!" chuckles White Spy, as he continues looting the embassy. But player one should beware, as Black Spy's retribution is only a respawn away… *




## BIO

Despite having been run out of Cuba after being accused of working for the CIA, Antonio Prohias couldn't resist giving a comedic edge to espionage in his *Spy Vs Spy* strips for *Mad* magazine, which depicted two spies locked in constant conflict. Naturally, it went down well as the world certainly needed some comedic respite at the height of the Cold War. The comic strip made for an great videogame, and was released for the Atari 8-bit family, Apple II and C64. Its success resulted in conversions to every format under the sun, as well as two sequels.




# MORE CLASSIC SPY VS SPY MOMENTS

## Fight! Fight! Fight!



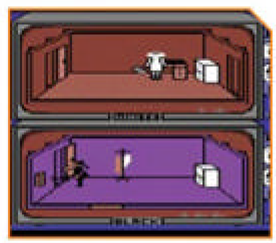
It's entirely possible to get through a game of *Spy Vs Spy* without seeing your opponent very much, but when you do encounter each other it can only end in a scrap. Black Spy and White Spy flail at each other with sticks, with the winner not only interrupting the opponent's progress, but also given the opportunity to claim their collected items.

## Raid The Room



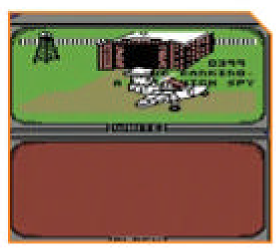
In one-player mode, *Spy Vs Spy* becomes a much more desperate race to find the items and make it to the airport, as your CPU opponent is typically a lot more interested in doing that than impeding your progress. The result is what appears to be a mad split-screen version of Finders Keepers, with both participants scramlbling around to find the items they need.

## Foiled again!



What could be more satisfying than successfully trapping your opponent? Thwarting their attempts to trap you, of course! If you can match the right item to your opponent's trap – for example, the umbrella for the acid bucket – you'll manage to avoid harm completely and your opponent will have wasted all the time they spent hatching their devious plan.

## One Way Ticket



Collecting all four items in the briefcase and making it to the airport is always enjoyable. However, for our money the sweetest victories are the ones snatched from the jaws of defeat – the ones in which you ambush your opponent, steal a full briefcase and leg it to the airport. Your opponent will be furious, so you might want to *actually* run too…



# BLACK WIDOW



### "BLACK WIDOW 101"

■ A 99-wave shooter, *Black Widow* pits you against a hierarchy of insects. Mosquitoes and beetles mob you, while hornets lay eggs that invulnerable Spoilers hatch from; Grenade Bugs and Rocket Bugs explode and fire projectiles respectively. If you're quicker than the competition you can harvest defeated insects for points.

**Soon after joining Atari Inc. Bruce Merritt pitched a game to his peers at a luxury resort retreat. Rory Milne discovers how Bruce's pitch evolved into the vector shooter: Black Widow**



## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** Atari Inc.
- » **DEVELOPER:** Atari Inc.
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **PLATFORM:** Arcade
- » **GENRE:** Shoot-'emem-up

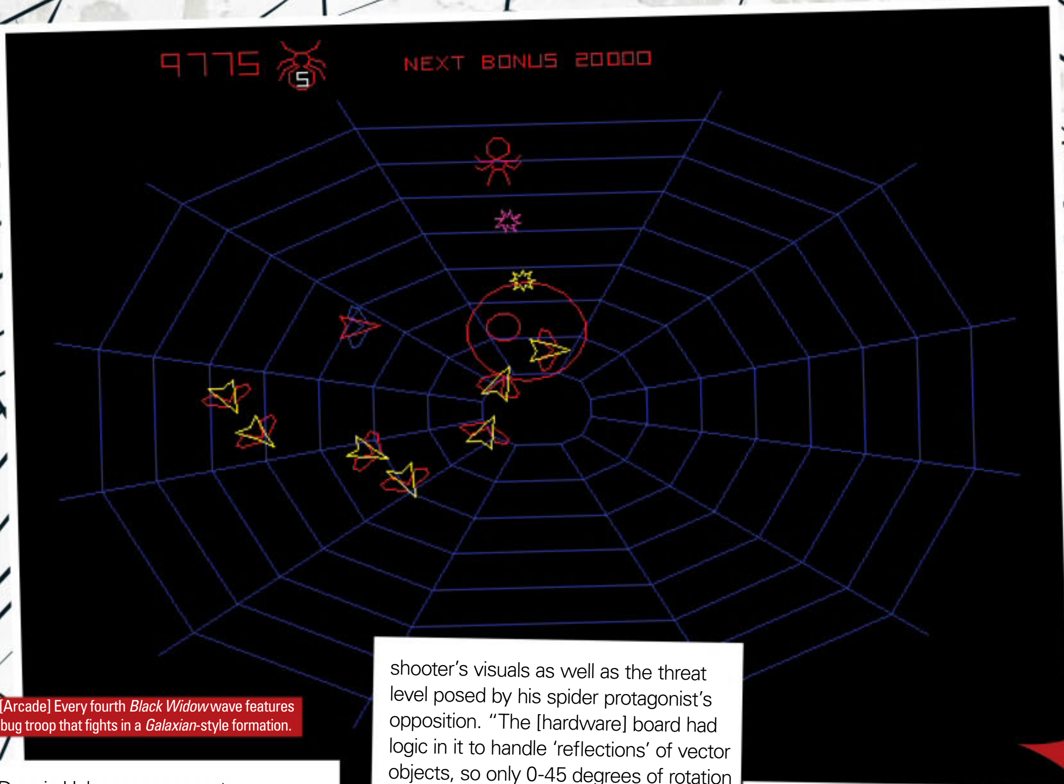
**The Atari Inc. workforce of the Seventies had a reputation for indulging in the excesses that characterised the times while producing some** of the best games of the era. Warner Communications' 1976 buyout of Atari led to new management promoting a more 'conventional' workplace, and by 1980 even Atari's previously raucous brainstorming retreats to the resorts of the Californian coast had become more sedate affairs, as ex-Atari developer Bruce Merritt remembers. "I never attended one of the Seventies 'wild years' events – only one in 1980 – it was luxurious and everyone was pretty well behaved. [There was] no drunken and naked hot tub *Animal House*-esque behaviour that I was aware of. Of course, if things like that really had happened we all would be sworn to secrecy and would never admit it anyway."

Bruce is less coy, though, on how he resurrected an abandoned game idea by pitching it to his fellow retreat attendees. "As I recall, there was a big binder – a 'Game Morgue' – of all the wild, half-baked game ideas that had been suggested but never implemented. Since I picked a game idea out of this book there was absolutely no need to defend its viability. Keep in mind that this event took place no more than a month or so after I started working there – so I was still an unknown quantity. All that I remember from it was that a spider walked on the strands of a web harvesting 'stuckees' that just happened to fly or walk onto it – the proof of concept was left as an exercise to the programmer."



» [Arcade] In *Black Widow*'s first wave. The slow moving opposition are restricted by green web-strand barriers.

Bruce's pitch proved successful, and a small team was assembled post-retreat to put the proven concept into development. Dedicated hardware was produced as Bruce coded with VAX mini-computers alongside an emulator, and he used a calculator and graph paper to design graphics for the project.



» [Arcade] Every fourth *Black Widow* wave features a bug troop that fights in a *Galaxian*-style formation.

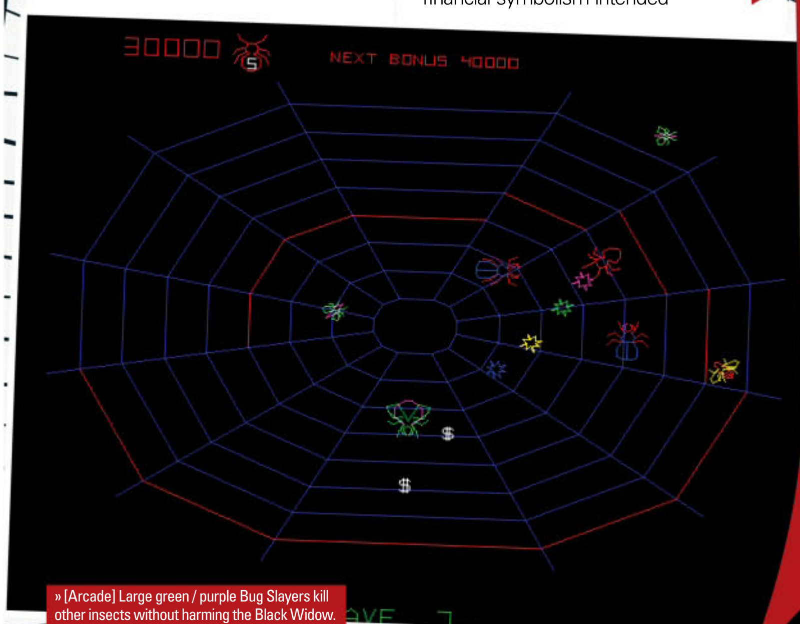
"Dennis Halverson – a great guy – was the hardware engineer on the project, Morgan Hoff was the project manager. We had a dedicated hardware board, which was a variation on *Tempest* hardware. The VAX had a 6502 cross-assembler and mass storage, everything else was done on a FORTH-based in-circuit emulator called Blue Box – thanks to Steve Calfee. I had a no hardware game math engine – a la *Battlezone* – so all 'rotations' were, in fact, pre-calculated sets of incremental vector coordinates. I drew all of it on some graph paper – individual bugs were drawn upright and then the 'rotations' were done using an HP calculator as I recall. The original game idea called for the spider to walk on the web-strands, an idea that was prototyped and discarded."

**Controls similar to *Asteroid* were also prototyped before dual joysticks, similar to those found on other popular** coin-op shooters, were employed instead, as Bruce recalls: "we had a spinner with a fire button, but, as I recall, we had a forward/reverse button pair since the spider inertia just didn't feel right, it wasn't *Asteroids*. A number of us were absolute *Robotron* junkies. The dual digital joysticks – we experimented using analogue ones first – were certainly homage to the effectiveness of those controls in moving in one direction while shooting in another. Adding that freedom allowed the game to throw more at the player while avoiding repetitive muscle injuries from frantic button pounding if you had to shoot and move in the direction that you were pointed."

This evolution of controls would affect Bruce's ongoing work on his shooter's visuals as well as the threat level posed by his spider protagonist's opposition. "The [hardware] board had logic in it to handle 'reflections' of vector objects, so only 0-45 degrees of rotation data was needed, the other seven variations were done with a combination of sign changes and X/Y reversals. Dennis implemented this idea of mine using digital on-board logic. This would have given far more angles, which were needed to support an analogue set of sticks – using eight-position digital joysticks this became moot. The bad guys would have benefited from more 'rotations' but that was just too bad."

The mechanics that would govern Bruce's eclectic bad guys were also being devised as gameplay based on memory limitations and constructive criticism emerged organically. "A spider on the web, bugs that got caught, that's pretty much the skeletal gameplay," Bruce explains "Egg laying and hatching, bulldozing, bugs-on-parade, grenade and rocket bugs – those were all conceived as we went along. 6502 EPROM memory capacity was probably the largest determinant of what went in and what didn't. Project teams were given freedom to chase things that worked, frequent drop-in playtesting by other teams' members teased out some unplanned gameplay."

The original game idea Bruce was now fleshing out had a spider harvesting insects, but in a moment of gory brilliance, Bruce realised that insects could cost his spider points by feeding on their fallen comrades, which he represented with Dollar signs. "I wanted to have the opponent bugs deal with the same issue the player was – which should be the next target? Just shooting the bugs wasn't enough, you had to go harvest the value before one of the other critters took it out. I wanted to represent something of decreasing value, the '$' metaphor worked for me. There wasn't any conscious political/financial symbolism intended ▶



» [Arcade] Large green / purple Bug Slayers kill other insects without harming the Black Widow.

## COIN-OP CREEPY CRAWLIES

### Other essential bug-themed arcade games

**BOXING BUGS**
DEVELOPER: Cinematronics YEAR: 1981

■ In *Boxing Bugs*, you defend a shielded centre screen position with a rotating cannon fitted with an extending boxing glove. Ground bugs attack your shields and then you, with time-bombs, but are vulnerable to cannon-fire. Bombs and flying bugs need to be punched away.



**LADY BUG**
DEVELOPER: Universal YEAR: 1981

■ Although it is superficially similar to *Pac-Man*, the revolving doors in *Lady Bug*'s mazes are a game-changing mechanic. This seemingly minor tweak, coupled with a lack of power-pills, helps to create an entirely original challenge despite the focus on dot-munching and monster dodging.



**BEEZER**
DEVELOPER: Tong Electronic YEAR: 1982

■ Much like *Lady Bug*, Beezer has a revolving door mechanic, but the similarities between the two games end there. Beezer's playfield is constructed from three-sided rotating turnstiles with the objective being to form hexagonal traps with them for killer bees. Each new level features ever more bees.



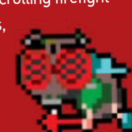
**NOBORANKA**
DEVELOPER: Data East YEAR: 1986

■ Equal parts platformer and shooter, Data East's curious genre-blend sees an anthropomorphised lady bird scaling trees – and tree-like structures – jumping from branch to branch while keeping a host of imaginatively realised insects at bay with a hail of bullets.



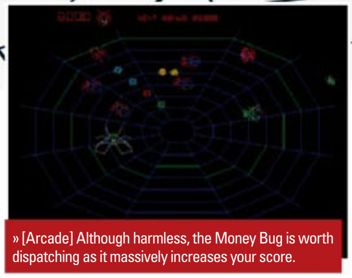
**INSECTOR X**
DEVELOPER: Taito YEAR: 1989

■ Taito's bug blaster was reimagined for the Mega Drive, but it's no substitute for the arcade original. *Insector X* is a side-scrolling firefight though insect-infested stages, which demands constant powering-up of a cannon and collection of secondary weapons to succeed.



– '$' was merely a stand-in for putrefaction and decay of bug bodies. I probably should have progressed from British pound symbol, dollar symbol and cent symbol instead of simply using colour changes."

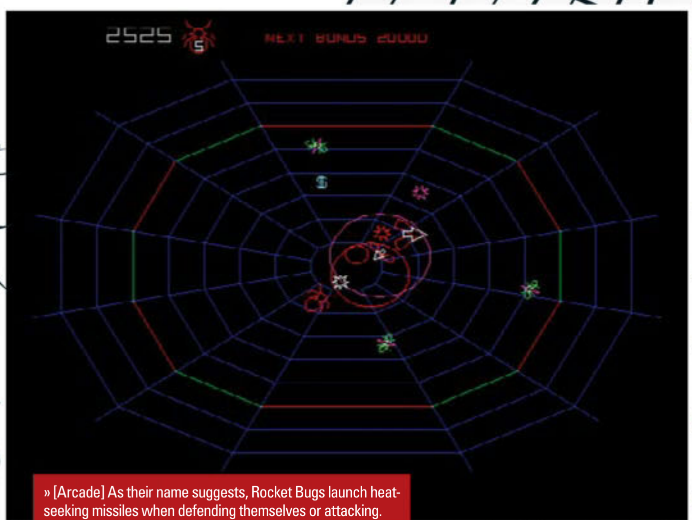
A technical limitation of the vector display Bruce was designing for soon required he create an insect that didn't decay. In fact, the Bug Slayer couldn't be killed but could kill other insects, which added an element of risk and reward to Bruce's game. "We maxed-out the number of bugs we could render on-screen without it beginning to flicker – indicative of not refreshing often enough," Bruce remembers. "Having a limit on the number of bugs brings scenarios where you, the spider, can hide on one side of an impenetrable wall with bugs on the other side and do nothing. I invented the Bug Slayer for that purpose, to keep the game moving along. Making the Bug Slayer indifferent/benign toward the player was a concession to game difficulty."



» [Arcade] Although harmless, the Money Bug is worth dispatching as it massively increases your score.

**Less benign, though, was the equally invulnerable Spoiler – an insect that could only be dispatched while in egg** form – which Bruce created in order to destroy green web-strand shields – and the spider form. "My thought process was something like: a) the player would benefit from some sort of defensive option, b) we didn't think of any power-up shield that was appropriate, so it became a stationary webwork to hide behind, c) the defense couldn't be used against the player – the green shields are transparent to player movement, and d) the defense was somehow time-limited or vulnerable to attack. Once we had the characteristics it became a matter of finding the right trigger to remove the shields – the 'big ugly' was the answer."

In order to introduce respites into his game's now intense gameplay, Bruce made every fourth wave a bonus level. These featured insects that resembled *Asteroids* ships that flew in *Galaxian*-style formations. "I actually think it was *Galaxian* that had the aerobatic attack critters, and since bug wings/legs were interchangeable the body shape was very economical [at] three vectors," he remembers. "It was fun to add that intermission to the bloodletting, awarding bonus for killing all or none – [i.e.] dodging the parade entirely. There are a couple of times during the choreography in which the lead bug notices your position and performs course correction to head for you so you can't stand and watch."



» [Arcade] As their name suggests, Rocket Bugs launch heat-seeking missiles when defending themselves or attacking.

In order to cleverly sidestep an unwritten Atari policy that was in place at the time, Bruce incorporated his team's first names into *Black Widow's* high-score table, something he's pleased about. "I thought I was being so cool in positioning our first names vertically like that, we were pretty-much forbidden – or so I was told – from putting anything in that would identify the designer because of management's fear that staff would be purloined by competitors."



**Although at this advanced stage, Bruce's game still had several stages of playtesting to be put through, which** resulted in a few tweaks. "There were focus groups where teams hid behind two-way mirrors and watched as people played the game 'cold'," Bruce Recalls. "The real 'decider' was the field test in a local arcade. Resulting stats – total games, average game time, dollar earnings – seemed to trump everything.

## THE XY FACTOR

### More curiosities from Atari's vector age



### LUNAR LANDER 1979

■ Its gameplay is hardly complex, but there's Zen-like satisfaction gained from mastering the perfect descent and safely docking on *Lunar Lander*'s vector moon. Stark warnings that you're low on fuel or haven't enough to get home add to the atmosphere.



### RED BARON 1980

■ Developed in tandem with *Battlezone*, *Red Baron* recreates the biplane battles of World War I in vector form. This high-octane combat flight simulator plays out over a mountain range with enemy flying squadrons, zeppelins and ground forces posing a constant threat.



### SPACE DUEL 1982

■ An evolution of *Asteroids*, *Space Dual* adds the highly original option of flying with two tethered ships, which rotate separately in the game's interesting two-player mode. In place of monochrome rocks, *Space Dual* has you targeting and subsequently blasting colourful geometric shapes.



### QUANTUM 1982

■ The unique premise offered by *Quantum* has players capturing groups of atomic particles by drawing fixed-length vectors around errant nuclei and electrons. Earlier levels can be defeated with some clumsy trackball use, but the more advanced stages require real skill.



### MAJOR HAVOC 1983

■ In many respects Atari's most ambitious vector effort, *Major Havoc* combines into-the-screen shootouts with low gravity missions through maze-like enemy space stations. This multi genre title even features a level warp system activated by beating a *Breakout* clone.

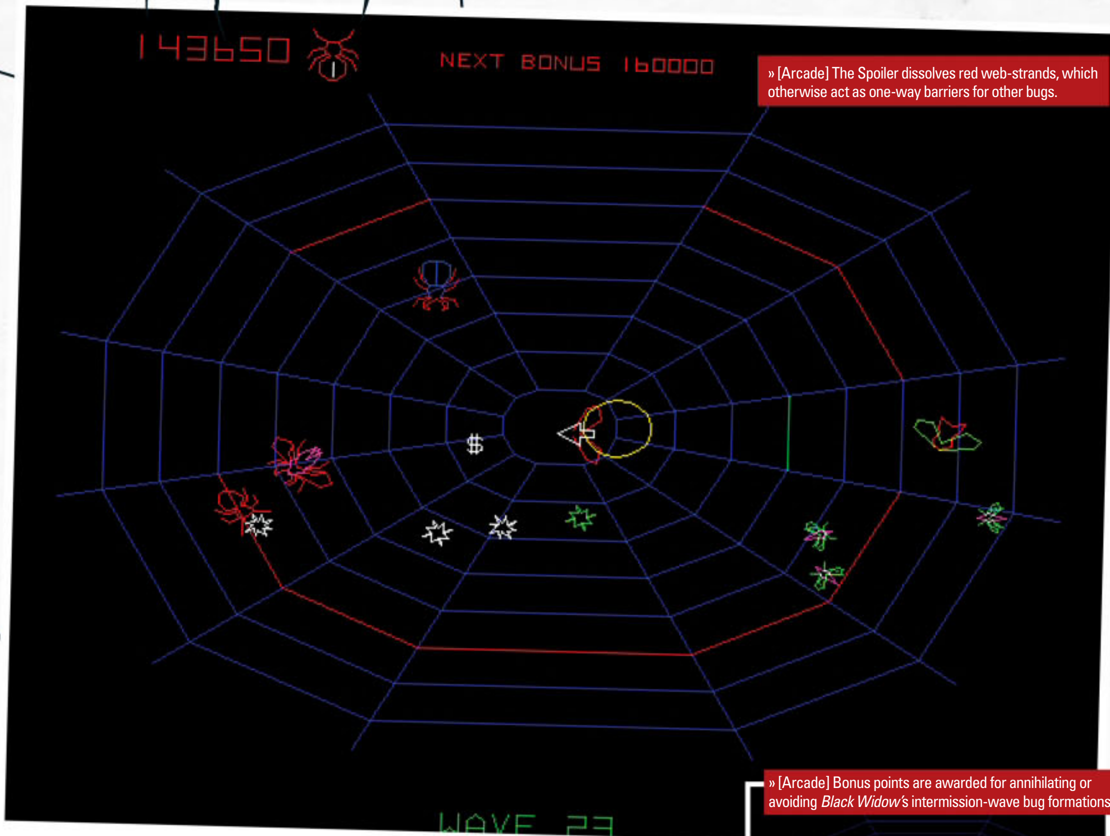


## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**ASTEROIDS**
**SYSTEM:** Arcade
**YEAR:** 1979

**TEMPEST** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** Arcade
**YEAR:** 1981

**STAR WARS**
**SYSTEM:** Arcade
**YEAR:** 1983




» [Arcade] The Spoiler dissolves red web-strands, which otherwise act as one-way barriers for other bugs.



» [Arcade] Beyond its initial waves, *Black Widow* combines foes requiring either careful handling or quick reflexes.



» [Arcade] Bonus points are awarded for annihilating or avoiding *Black Widow*'s intermission-wave bug formations.

Changes made were mostly regarding ramping of difficulty and perhaps some DIP switch settings for the projectile size."

Given its unforgiving nature, it's unsurprising that this playtesting didn't tip Bruce off that his game would lock up on Wave 104. "We had expected to have killed-off the player long before that point. I suppose in retrospect we could have just loaded the deck with nothing but grenade bugs and rocket bugs since wrapping-around too easily was out of the question," he admits.

But soon after cabinet and marquee art emblazoned with the title '*Black Widow*' was produced, Bruce was asked to re-port his game to an alternative hardware setup. "*Black Widow* was essentially 'done' and ready to go into production. It was its own product, had its own motherboard, cabinet and artwork. In the final weeks we were compelled to re-port the game to Gravitar hardware since there was an overabundance of Gravitar systems clogging some warehouse. The retrofit kit idea was mandated: decals, replacement control panel, replacement bezel, replacement EPROMS – all [the] things to convert a Gravitar to *Black Widow*. The Gravitar retargeting was one of timing, that game just wasn't selling. Rusty Dawe [had] put together a software music-box into which we coded Prokofiev's *Hall Of The Mountain King* – something I really wanted as background music, alas there wasn't room in the production [of the] Gravitar release so it was dropped. The finer 'rotation' images were [also] lost when doing the port. I don't recall if there ever were actual *Black Widow* games – not Gravitar conversions. There must have been, but they wouldn't have had original *Black Widow* logic boards."

> "Working three days on Dig Dug paid me a greater financial reward than working on Black Widow for 18 months"
> Bruce Meritt

On the game's arrival in arcades, Bruce expresses pride and takes a balanced view of the financial and creative rewards that he reaped from his game. "I was exhausted and very proud of it – all the rework we did to prune the features a Gravitar board couldn't support was regrettable and [it wasn't] especially creative or rewarding. I don't know how many units we were quoted as having sold but I do recall that working for three days on *Dig Dug* paid me a greater financial reward than working on *Black Widow* for 18 months. This [was] an indicator of where the flavour of games was shifting at that time. Everyone hoped their game would sell a bazillion units, but the competition was more for dazzling with your creativity and ingenuity – we were being paid to do something that we loved, all the rest was frosting."




» [Arcade] Avoiding the blast of a Rocket Bug missile while under fire is extremely challenging.

Asked for his retrospective thoughts on *Black Widow*, Bruce offers a philosophical appraisal of his classic vector shooter. "Having only written this one game I was never in the leagues of my co-workers who had repeated money-making hits. [It's] not a bad game for a single 6502 microprocessor and a mere handful of memory, I think that's a lot of action for so little hardware. I'm delighted that it's still being played," Bruce concludes. *

**Many thanks to Bruce Merritt for sharing his memories. Cabinet photos courtesy of Bill Johnston at ChompingQuarters.com**

retro GAMER READERS' CHOICE

# THE GREATEST MULTIPLAYER GAMES EVER!



**Call your friends, get some food in and pass out the control pads – Retro Gamer readers have voted on their favourite multiplayer games of all time. Nick Thorpe is your guide to these games night essentials…**




**We don't know where we'd be without multiplayer. Interaction with other players was a staple of videogames long before there was a videogames** industry to speak of, thanks to the likes of *Tennis For Two* and *Spacewar*, and it has endured despite the development of rich and engaging single-player experiences. No matter whether you took down a co-op game with your dad, treated your housemates to an elaborate victory dance or came *this close* to winning a tournament – the deeply personal stories that star you and your friends will always hit closer to home than even the best script from someone else.

We asked our readers to nominate their favourite multiplayer games of all time, to celebrate the games that have brought us together over the years. The results are interesting: collectively, you've overwhelmingly chosen local multiplayer over online favourites such as *Quake* and *Phantasy Star Online*, and there's a preference for competitive games to co-operative ones. What really hit us was the diversity of your choices – so instead of a regular old list with one winner, we've put together a list of awards that reflects the balance of voting in order to give all of your favourites their own deserved time in the spotlight. So without any further ado, on with the awards!

## RETRO GAMER'S HOUSE RULES

**Pausing without good reason is punishable by forfeit**

Co-op partners must always leave health pick-ups for the weak

**Cheats can be used if agreed by all parties before the game**

When the pizza arrives, the most recent winner goes to the door

**Oddjob is banned. No exceptions**




# BEST ARCADE RACER

## BY THE NUMBERS

# BEAT YOUR FRIENDS

1 The feather is an invaluable shortcut tool, thanks to its high jump ability – learn where you can use it to skip huge parts of the track.

2 When Monty Mole latches onto you, you'll slow down and drop coins. Shake him off by hopping with the shoulder buttons.

3 Prioritise coin collection, as they'll raise your speed. If you lose them to shell hits later, make sure to get them back.



# SUPER MARIO KART

**DEVELOPER:** Nintendo **YEAR:** 1992

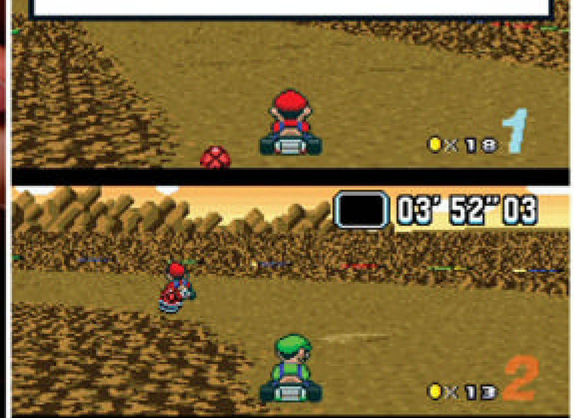
It's no surprise that *Super Mario Kart* is being celebrated for its impact on multiplayer gaming – after all, the addition of split-screen play was its major contribution to the Mode 7 racing template Nintendo had established with *F-Zero*. But if the game's multiplayer had just been a technical development, it wouldn't be so revered today. *Super Mario Kart* was the perfect storm of technical prowess and carefully considered gameplay, and the result was possibly the best spin-off ever made.

While the colourful characters give the game a family-friendly look that lures players of all ages in, the truth is that *Super Mario Kart* is one of the most vicious racers of its era, thanks to the inclusion of weaponry that allows players to even the odds with their opponents. What starts out as Mario and his Mushroom Kingdom buddies having a nice race quickly degenerates into a shower of insults, as shells are flung with merry abandon. Thankfully, the inclusion of a battle mode allows players to forget any pretence of racing and just pummel each other with shells to settle their differences.

Despite the fact that *Super Mario Kart* has had so many sequels since 1992, it's the original that came out on top amongst readers. We can see why, too. While the sequels have added a variety of extra features, most notably the ability for more than two players to take part, the first game possesses a certain simplicity which the later games lack. In *Super Mario Kart*, you don't have to choose vehicles, master any drift techniques, or hope not to be robbed of victory by an untimely Blue Shell – just pick your racer and let the best player win. And let it be known that in a one-on-one 150cc Rainbow Road race, the best player will always, *always* be us.

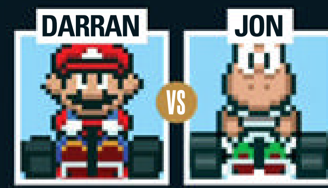
## KEY MOMENTS

**It's the last lap of your final race. You're in second place, but you have one Red Shell and one final corner. You almost think you're going to miss as your opponent turns, but – WHAM! – it's a direct hit. You take the chequered flag.**

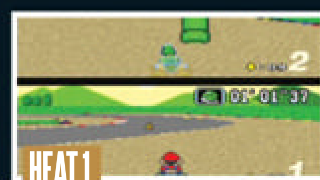



## FACE-OFF: SUPER MARIO KART

**Whose shell will prove toughest to crack?**



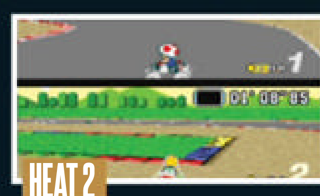

Darran pulls ahead early and it looks like he's got it in the bag, as Jon squanders a Red Shell. However, a timely star seals victory for our Art Editor in the penultimate lap.



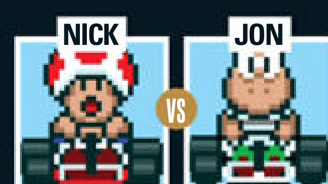
HEAT 1



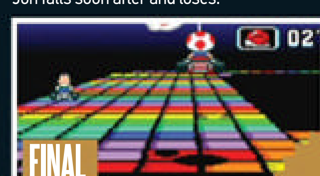

Drew leads after the first lap, but is overtaken in the second and ends up developing an affection for walls to his own downfall, placing Nick in the final race.



HEAT 2




The pressure is weighing on both men, as neither player seems capable of staying on the track. A fall almost costs Nick, but Jon falls soon after and loses.



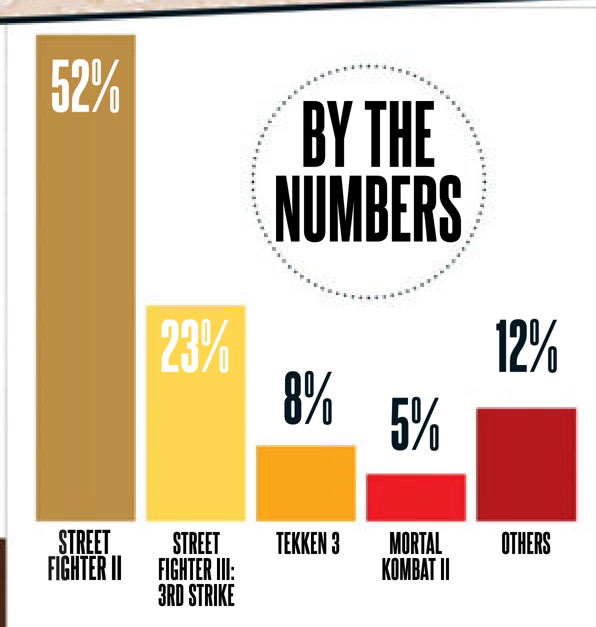
FINAL

WINNER NICK

BEST FIGHTING GAME



» [SNES] *Street Fighter II* played a part in the success of the SNES. We remember giving our friends lessons so they could clean up in the arcades.




# STREET FIGHTER II

**DEVELOPER:** Capcom **YEAR:** 1991

What better way to settle any quarrel than with a good old-fashioned one-on-one fight? Duelling was the number one method of conflict resolution for centuries for a reason – it's perfect. But what if there was a way of employing this tried and tested solution without putting your perfect smile or fancy new duds at risk? That's the very question that Capcom asked and immediately answered with *Street Fighter II*, arguably the game that birthed competitive fighters.

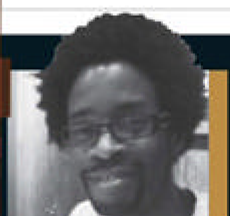
It was in *Street Fighter II* that roster variety was truly born, and many of us will have chosen an allegiance at an early age and never looked back. There are Shoto players, who managed to make the SNES pad bend to their Dragon-Punching will; there are charge players, who mastered the then-alien concept of holding one direction before pressing the opposite way and a button; there are Zangief players, who somehow got 360 degree motions and inputs to be read consistently. Fact is, you chose a side at that exact point in your life, and it's somewhat unlikely that you've moved on since.

Even today, these characters all play in different manners, and that's what makes *Street Fighter II* such a perfect game. Each match-up plays out differently, with player-specific strategies and preferences further altering the dynamic to the point that no two matches are alike. There are depths to master in the special move motions and the accidental birth of the combo system, but normals and throws still pack enough of a punch to allow those who rely on basic tactics a decent shot at victory.

The series has evolved, but as much as the new technical elements add for expert players, they also detract from the purity that is such a huge part of *Street Fighter II*'s success. The ultimate one-on-one test of skill, *Street Fighter II* is a perfect brawler.

> "I simply played at the arcade when I could, that was all we had. No fancy console conversions with convenient training modes, no YouTube, just your local arcades"
>
> Ryan Hart on getting better





## RYAN HART VS RYAN KING



**The UK's most famous competitive fighting game player and our resident expert discuss their experiences on the tournament scene**

**When did you start attending *Street Fighter* tournaments? How did you do early on?**

**RH:** I entered my first Tournament in 1994. It was *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, held in London Trocadero and sponsored by Kiss FM. We had never had tournaments before that. It was a winner stays on timed tournament on ten machines. I got a few wins early on, but lost and then continually lost until the time ran out. It was a good experience though.

**RK:** I didn't attend *Street Fighter II* tournaments until after the release of *Hyper Street Fighter II*. I used to play as Hyper Fighting Chun-Li and my main tactic was to tick into throw off crouching medium kick and jumping light kick. It was enough to get past inexperienced players, but anyone who'd been playing *Street Fighter II* for a while steam-rolled me.

**How did you work on improving your game?**

**RH:** I simply played at the arcade when I could, that was all we had. No fancy console conversions with convenient training modes, no YouTube, just your local arcades. I played against the other players there and when I lost I tried to understand it and progress.

**RK:** Casino arcade in London had a *Hyper Street Fighter II* arcade cabinet and was home to the best players, so that's where I used to play. There were two players in particular, Shoji and Ryza, who were dominant but you'd face all sorts of players and all sorts of tactics. It was a great learning environment – everyone was so good, you had no choice but to level up and stamp out bad habits if you wanted to get anywhere.

**What made *Street Fighter II* and its updates such a good multiplayer game?**

**RH:** The heritage for *Street Fighter* takes it a long way. No matter who, they have probably heard about *Street Fighter* at some point and this makes it a strong social entity because it joins people together. *Street Fighter IV* for example, following its release in 2009, did a very good job of bringing players from all fighting games together.

**RK:** I think the main thing that made *Street Fighter II* such a compelling high-level game to compete in is that there is no margin for error at all. The damage is just so high that one mistake can cost you the round, and getting knocked down or trapped in the corner puts you in a really difficult situation. It also put a big emphasis on the match-ups – how Guile plays against Ryu is completely different to how he would play against, say, Dhalsim.




## BEAT YOUR FRIENDS

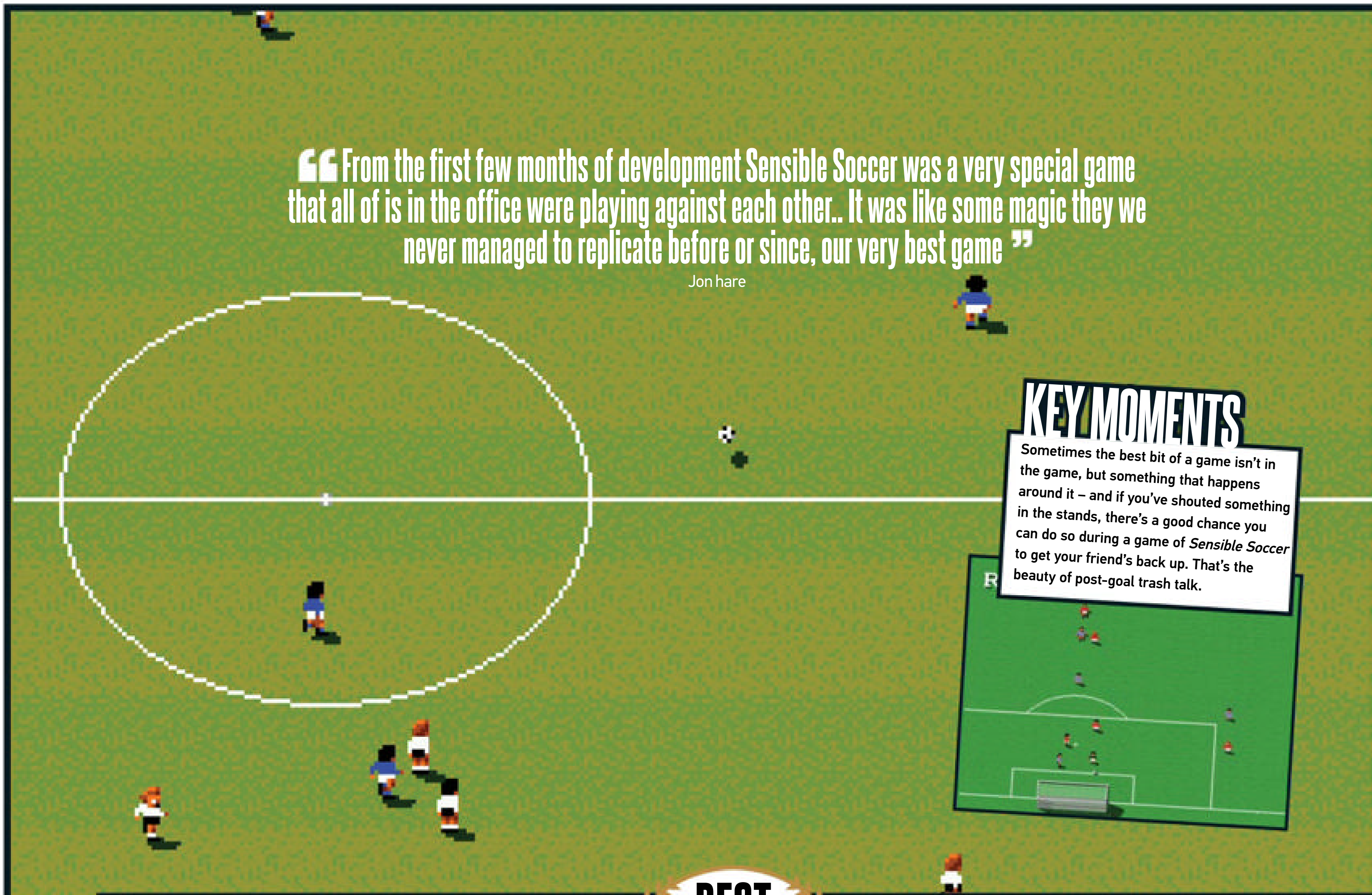
**1** Damage was toned down heavily in later games but *SFII* throws out a crazy amount of damage. Mash out a few jab strings to get your opponent blocking then toss them aside.

**2** Being able to perform a Dragon Punch made you a god among *SF* players, and not that much has changed. Everyone still jumps too much. Punish them for it.

**3** If they're gonna spam Blanka's electricity forever, pick a character who can deal damage at distance. Learn to play against the player rather than the character.

## KEY MOMENTS

Managing to stun your opponent (it's way easier in *Street Fighter II* than other *Street Fighter* games) and using the downtime in the fight to either physically or mentally mock them before landing the killing blow. A thumbs-up to the face to rapid in-game crouching both work brilliantly. Perform your weird little send-off, then deliver the Shoryuken de grace.



> "From the first few months of development Sensible Soccer was a very special game that all of is in the office were playing against each other.. It was like some magic they we never managed to replicate before or since, our very best game"
>
> Jon hare

## KEY MOMENTS

Sometimes the best bit of a game isn't in the game, but something that happens around it – and if you've shouted something in the stands, there's a good chance you can do so during a game of *Sensible Soccer* to get your friend's back up. That's the beauty of post-goal trash talk.

# SENSIBLE SOCCER

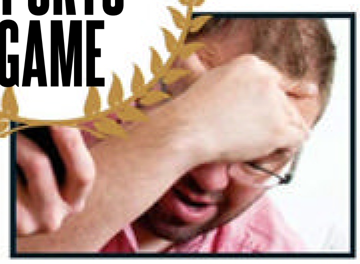
**BEST SPORTS GAME**

**DEVELOPER:** Sensible Software **YEAR:** 1992

Was there any chance that *Sensible Soccer* would fail to win this category? Definitely – after all, it didn't reach number one in your list of the top 25 Amiga games, nor the top 25 sports games. However, football is a simple game and it's befitting that your favourite multiplayer sports game is a simple representation of it. It's easy to pick up *Sensible Soccer*, know what you're doing and get your players doing what you want – which is something that can't be said for *Speedball 2*, which requires more explanation of its rules, nor *Pro Evolution Soccer 4* which has rather more complex controls. It seems there's a lot to be said for accessibility!

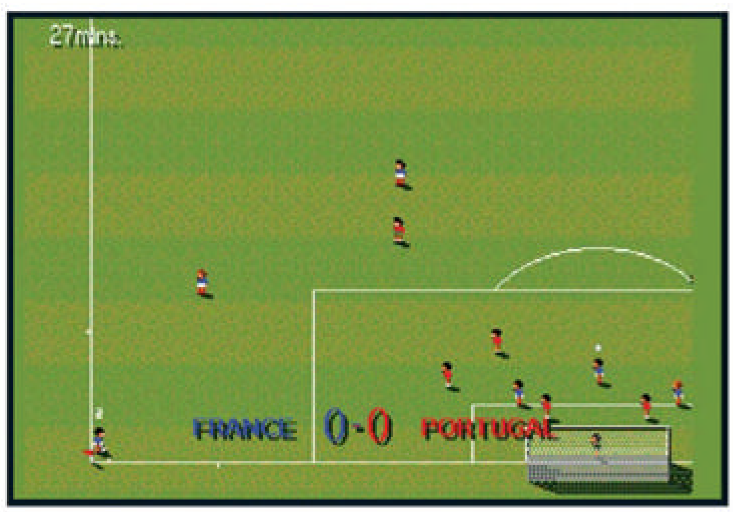
While *Sensible Soccer* is an easy game to pick up and play, mastery takes a long time. As players improve, ball control becomes easier and curling shots go from being an consequence of controller manipulation to a formidable tool in the arsenal of your tiny strikers. And these are *your* tiny strikers, without a doubt – *Sensible Soccer* always boasted a great wealth of teams and even allowed you to edit them, enabling players to pick their favourites without having to compromise. We're always much more invested in a match when our pride as club supporters comes into play.

Of course, some readers will be asking why *Sensible Soccer* has won out over the improved sequel, *Sensible World Of Soccer*. The answer is simple: the original game received conversions to a variety of consoles that didn't receive the sequel such as the Mega Drive and SNES, ensuring greater name recognition. However, it's well worth mentioning *SWOS* – the successor to *Sensible Soccer* has kept the game alive, earning a port to the Xbox 360 and even drawing players from across Europe to the Sensible Days competitions. But while the original *Sensible Soccer* is no longer the choice amongst the most ardent fans of the series, its role as the foundation of an incredibly enduring game is worthy of recognition. It's fast and fun football – what more could you want from a sports game?



## BY THE NUMBERS

- SENSIBLE SOCCER 10%
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE 9%
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER 5%
- PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4 5%
- OTHERS 71%



**BEST BEAT-'EM-UP GAME**

# DOUBLE DRAGON

**DEVELOPER:** Arcade **YEAR:** 1987



*Renegade* was a good game, and Technos understood that – after all, the company wouldn't have followed up on it if it hadn't seen merit in it. However, it's hard to believe that the company knew quite what it was getting into with *Double Dragon*. By the mid-Nineties, the game had spawned various sequels, a crossover game with *Battletoads*, a cartoon series and a live action film. As well as all of that, it had clearly set the template for beat-'em-up peers in the arcade and at home. Why was *Double Dragon* such a success? We'd argue that it was because it was the first game to tap into a simple truth about beat-'em-ups: they're way more fun with a friend in tow.

Billy Lee and his brother, Jimmy, fight their way through an army of street punks to rescue the kidnapped Marian. The game itself is a logical step up from *Renegade*, adopting a similar style but allowing for two players to get into the action. What isn't easy to appreciate at first glance is the range of decisions made that actually mean something. For example, enemies can grab Billy or Jimmy from behind and prevent them from moving. Botched communication will lead to bad consequences too, as swinging wildly means you might hit your poor co-op partner – a capability which leads to one of gaming's most memorable twists. *Double Dragon* didn't just adopt multiplayer capabilities – Technos understood what made the inclusion worthwhile and worked to make it memorable.

All of the games that didn't quite win this award can claim to have descended from *Double Dragon* in design terms – *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage II* are more elaborate versions of the same idea. But while those games developed the formula, *Double Dragon*'s influence makes it your favourite multiplayer beat-'em-up.




## KEY MOMENTS

Machine Gun Willy has been defeated and Marian has been rescued. So everything's good now, right? Not quite – there's still the unresolved matter of two jealous brothers who just happen to share a love interest. There's one more fight left, and this time it's against your very own co-op partner!

## BY THE NUMBERS

- DOUBLE DRAGON 24%
- TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 13%
- FINAL FIGHT 9%
- STREETS OF RAGE II 7%
- OTHERS 47%




"While it's great fun to play with a friend, that final showdown is always in the back of your mind. . ."

Nick Thorpe

## BEST PARTY GAME

# MEGA BOMBERMAN

**DEVELOPER:** Hudson Soft **YEAR:** 1993







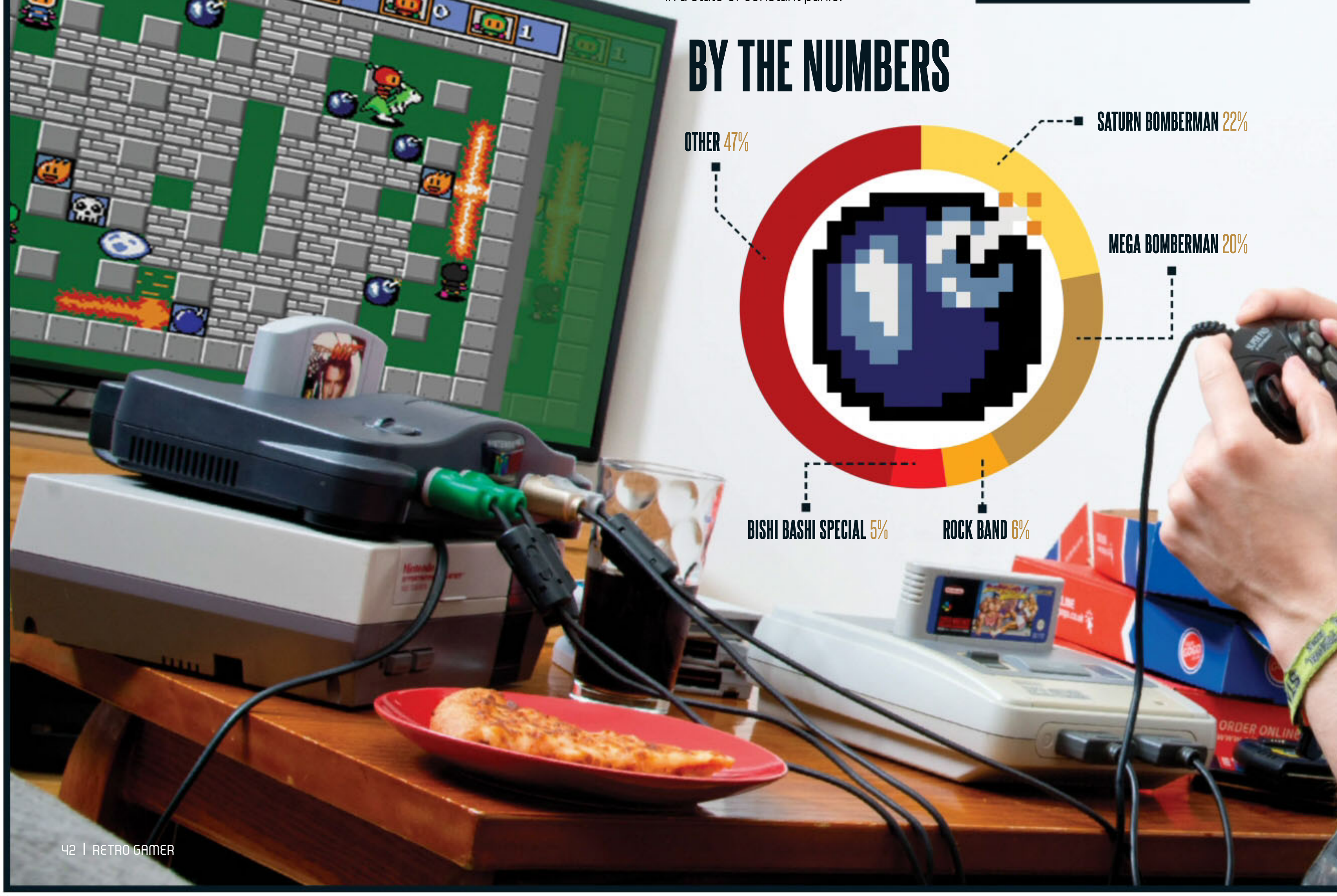
We never imagined that pyromaniacs would be cute. That's probably due to our lack of preconceived notions about pyromaniacs more than anything else, but Bomberman is a confounding little guy – cute as a button, yet driven to murder his compatriots in acts of explosive violence. We're not sure why he does it, but what we do know is that we enjoy it, and evidently **Retro Gamer** readers share that love.

*Mega Bomberman*'s greatest asset as a multiplayer game is the sense of tension it creates. A *Street Fighter* player can win the fight no matter how little health they have left, and a single mistake is unlikely to ruin your whole race in *Super Mario Kart*. In *Bomberman*, your default state is one of immense vulnerability, where a single hit is enough to end your round. This leads to fairly nervous behaviour in general, but by far the worst moment is being trapped by a bomb. It's a moment of sheer panic, quickly superseded by resigned acceptance of the fact that your round is over.

When four players of similar skill play *Mega Bomberman*, the fact that players are given equal starting points is almost irrelevant as the random distribution of power-ups quickly unbalances play and ensures that everyone can get a win. However, there are a number of surprising tricks an expert player can call upon to ensure your speedy detonation regardless of the odds against them.

We'd never say there's no such thing as too many explosions, primarily because we're familiar with the cinematic work of Michael Bay, but *Mega Bomberman* is the kind of game that almost tempts us to do so. Making your friends explode just never seems to get old, especially with the full roster of four players involved. It's always a nervy affair and there's never any shortage of shouting, but when all is said and done we've never had quite so much fun in a state of constant panic.

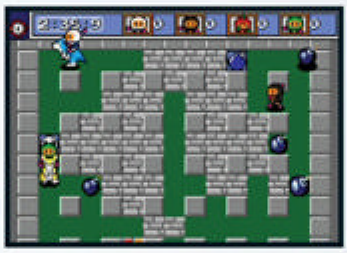
## BY THE NUMBERS



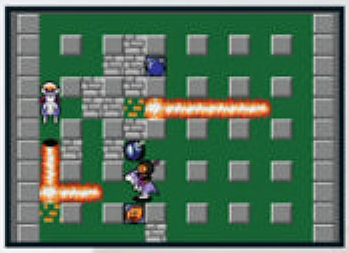
## BEAT YOUR FRIENDS



**1** After you kick a bomb, you can stop it mid-travel with the A button to trap an opponent or ensure that you attack the right lane.



**2** If you kick a bomb off the side of the screen with a Louie, it'll bounce over the wall on the other side to kill unsuspecting opponents.

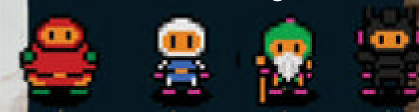


**3** The purple Louie can be used to avoid blasts – if you time your jump just before the bomb detonates, you'll dodge it mid-air.

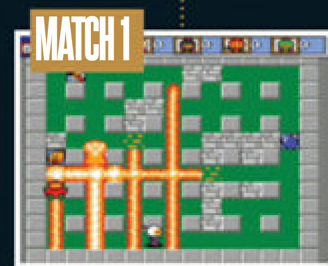
> "Mega Bomberman multiplayer was awesome fun, getting some of your mates round for a blast to see who was the best!"
>
> Jim Bagley

## READY, STEADY… BOMB!

Everyone's got a short fuse in this war of all against all

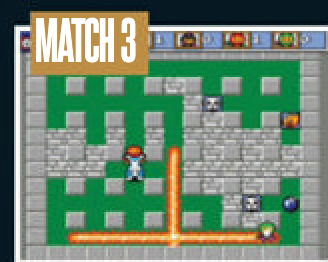



### MATCH 1



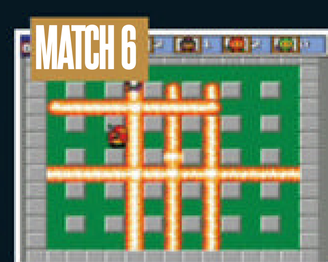
Jon blows himself up and Drew strolls into a blast. Our esteemed Editor manages to toast himself and Nick takes the round.

### MATCH 3



Jon and Nick exit early, leaving Drew to fight Darran – who pulls ahead with a second victory after Drew is trapped in a corner.

### MATCH 6



A victory for Darran ends the game here. Drew traps Nick early, but perishes in Darran's explosive lattice.

### WINNER: DARRAN

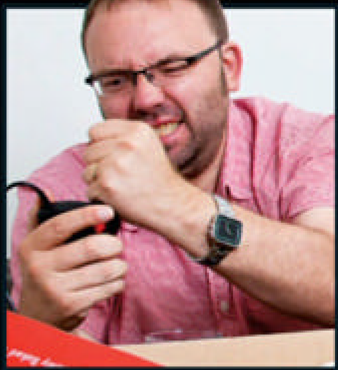



## KEY MOMENTS

It's down to the last two players in the match, and one's at an advantage as they've got a Joey shielding them. But suddenly, a trap is sprung! The stuck player tries frantically to get out, but their dancing pink Joey is useless. It's all square now – game on. May the best bomber win.







## BEST ALTERNATIVE CONTROL

# WARLORDS

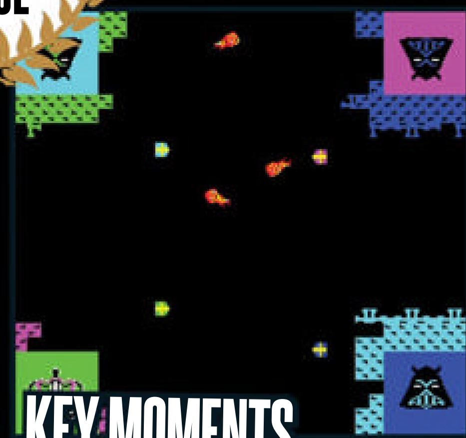
**DEVELOPER:** Atari **YEAR:** 1980

We've got to be honest – when it came to peripheral-aided gaming, we thought that *Rock Band* was going to run away with the vote. But there's still a huge amount of love for Atari's classic combat-oriented spin on the popular bat-and-ball games of the Seventies, and it's not hard to see why. The combination of *Quadrapong*'s four-player gameplay and *Breakout*'s block-breaking mechanics still makes for a fiercely competitive game, as players attempt to break down the fortifications of their opponents and take them out. As gameplay progresses, the stakes get higher as additional balls are added to the battlefield until only one player is left standing. The ability to hold a ball and choose where to fire it is the key mechanic here, as it allows you to victimise weaker players at the cost of some damage to your own wall. If you're fond of being a jerk to your friends during multiplayer games, it's a pretty great tactic – so naturally, it's one that we regularly employ to devastating effect.

Despite the fact that the arcade version was released well in advance of the home version, former Atari engineer, Carla Meninsky, has noted that the Atari 2600 version was developed first. While the arcade game is excellent, the home version was a very special thing – not only was it a four-player game on a machine that didn't have many four-player games, but it was one of the few games that made it worth busting out the paddle controller. The oldest game on our list is one that everyone needs to play – it's simple, but it is incredibly addictive with a few like-minded players in the room.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- WARLORDS 62%
- ROCK BAND 13%
- PAC-MAN VS 7%
- THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 3%
- OTHER 15%



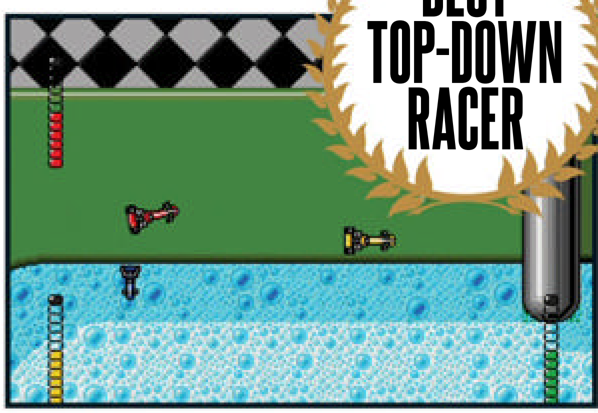
### KEY MOMENTS

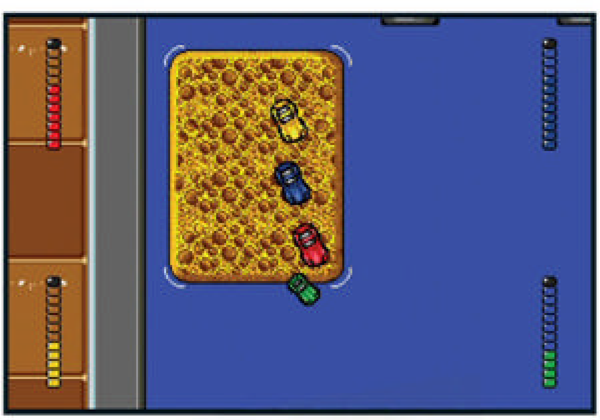
The game has not been kind to you – having held the fireball too much and taken a few careless hits, you've got virtually no protective wall left. You've held out and kept yourself alive, but now a third fireball has joined the battle. Can you continue to survive?

## BEST TOP-DOWN RACER

# MICRO MACHINES 2

**DEVELOPER:** Codeasters **YEAR:** 1994





One of the interesting things about multiplayer games is that there's something of a genre imbalance. Very few votes came through for RPGs, but some genres were heavily represented. In fact, racing games were so heavily represented as to dominate the voting, requiring we split the awards. Just as it was to be expected that a *Mario Kart* game would win arcade racers, a *Micro Machines game* was always going to be the top-down game of choice – it was just a question of which one. It's the second game that took the honours here, which makes sense as it was the first to introduce the innovative J-Cart technology, including two control ports in the cartridge to do away with the need for a multi-tap.

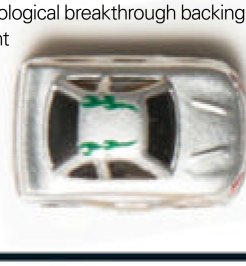
The key thing about the *Micro Machines* games is that the racing environments are pretty hazardous. Crossing the gap between tables by driving over a ruler is a cute nod to the size of the toys, but the drop from either side just invites some 'unintentional' barging that quickly turns into full-on vehicular war. Experts can easily be toppled by novices, simply by virtue of getting in the way of a non-braking opponent and being bashed off the edge, keeping the fun factor high. Additionally, the points-based racing set-up allows for some truly spectacular comebacks, as no player can ever be so far behind as to have no chance at winning. *Micro Machines 2* added to the fun of the original formula with additional vehicle types and improved course design, and with Codemasters' technological breakthrough backing up the excellent software, the series went from being simply fun to a legendary example of multiplayer gaming.

### BY THE NUMBERS

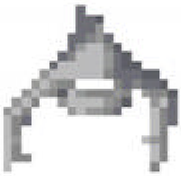
- MICRO MACHINES 2 21%
- MICRO MACHINES 96 14%
- SUPER CARS II 14%
- SUPER SPRINT 7%
- OTHER 44%













# GAUNTLET

**BEST CO-OP GAME**

**DEVELOPER:** Atari Games **YEAR:** 1985

Competitive games are more popular with the **Retro Gamer** readership than co-operative games, but there's an undercurrent of support for them – and the biggest game in the category by far was *Gauntlet*, the four-player dungeon crawling classic. Unlike some other four-player games, *Gauntlet* fixes the player roster so that each player can play only one of the four characters – Wizard, Warrior, Elf and Valkyrie. The team adventures through sprawling dungeons, fighting various monsters, collecting treasure, unlocking closed rooms and trying to find an exit – all while keeping their health up by regularly collecting food. It's a template which has influenced a variety of popular multiplayer games since – Blizzard's *Diablo* series and Sega's *Phantasy Star Online* are just two of the games that owe something to *Gauntlet*.

*Gauntlet*'s appeal lies heavily in the smaller elements of its design. The fact that each character has a distinctive set of statistics means that every member of the team is useful in a specific situation – the elf doesn't excel at close combat, but makes up for it with ranged attack abilities. Additionally, the dwindling health supply makes finding food necessary, no matter how well you're all doing – which can create conflict as players snatch away items that might keep their friends going longer. Worse yet, they could shoot the food! Thankfully, the memorable audio clued players in to who needed feeding next, meaning that excuses were rather thin on the ground.

While home versions of *Gauntlet* weren't able to capture the arcade game's memorable action, the arcade game was popular enough to become your favourite co-op game – an impressive feat indeed.

## BY THE NUMBERS

- GAUNTLET 16%
- BUBBLE BOBBLE 11%
- DOUBLE DRAGON 8%
- HALO 5%
- OTHER 60%







# WORMS

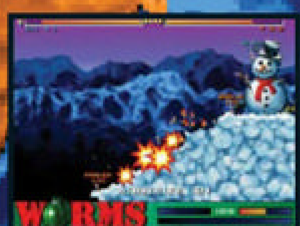
**BEST STRATEGY GAME**

**DEVELOPER:** Team 17 **YEAR:** 1995

Life can feel pretty unfair when you're playing *Worms*. It's entirely possible for half of your team to be taken out by a well-placed bazooka blast before you've even had a chance to affect the game, and yet it's hard to feel truly bad about it. We think it's the voices that do it – it's hard to build any sort of true resentment when you are getting rather angry over tiny worms shouting, "Oi, nutter!" Besides, it's entirely likely that you'll be able to get your own back in spectacular fashion when you do finally get to take control.

The strategic combat of *Worms* takes cues from artillery games such as *Scorched Earth* and *Tank Wars*, and many of the weapons are fairly standard in the first game – players utilise Bazookas, Grenades, Shotguns and the like. However, the most popular weapons were the more comedic ones such as the likes of the Sheep and the Banana Bomb, which influenced the direction of the increasingly bizarre weapons in the sequels such as the Concrete Donkey.

It's also worth noting that as a turn-based game, many versions of *Worms* support multiplayer without the need for any extra controllers, which is very useful when you're caught short. It's also one of those games that encourages extra-curricular competition – while we've often fought for supremacy in battle, we've just as often tried to see who can create the most carnage in a single shot. What's the best thing about that? Easy – the developers knew that would happen, and implemented awards and replays to show it off. Perfect.

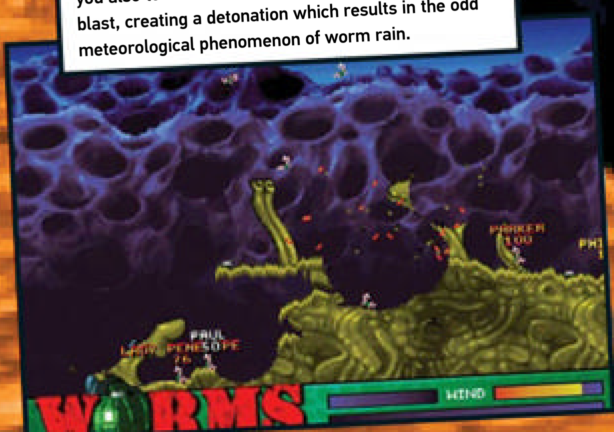



## BY THE NUMBERS

- WORMS 30%
- CHAOS: THE BATTLE OF WIZARDS 17%
- STARCRAFT 8%
- DEATH TANK ZWEI 8%
- OTHER 37%

## KEY MOMENTS

You attempted to jump clear of a dynamite blast, but it all went horribly wrong – you bumped into some stray scenery and bounced straight back. Luckily you also took two other worms much closer to the blast, creating a detonation which results in the odd meteorological phenomenon of worm rain.



# Q&A STEVE ELLIS

**Programmer on GoldenEye 007**



***GoldenEye*'s multiplayer mode was added to the game quite late in development. What prompted its inclusion?**
It certainly wasn't a planned feature in the beginning. We were nearing the end of development and despite being far past our original intended release date, we thought that it would be a nice feature to have, so we set about trying to implement it. We didn't know whether the N64 would be powerful enough to handle it, so step one was establishing that it could work at all. Once we had got it working, it very quickly became a feature that we couldn't ship without. It was obviously going to be a lot of fun.

**What challenges did you encounter while coding the multiplayer component?**
Aside from the obvious technical challenge of getting it running at all on a platform that has something like 1 per cent of the power of your smartphone, the main challenge was that up to that point, the game didn't have any concept of 'players'. It didn't need to, because we had never intended there to be multiple players. All of the code assumed that there was one player in the game. Visibility calculations, rendering order, collisions, etc. were all considered a part of the overall game state. That needed to change, which required a tedious process of making changes across the whole codebase to introduce the concept of multiple players, each having their own state, and then resolving all of the issues which that had created.

**Do you have a favourite stage to play in *GoldenEye*'s multiplayer?**
My favourite level overall was, I think, the Temple, although I always enjoyed playing the Complex with Proximity Mines, or the Library with Golden Guns…

**Did you expect that players would still be enjoying *GoldenEye*'s multiplayer mode so long after the game was released?**
I had no idea. I just wanted to make a good game. For almost all of us on the team, we were new to the industry and it was our first game, so we didn't really know what to expect after release – but no, I don't think any of us expected to be still receiving emails about it fairly regularly after nearly 18 years.

**"I've lost count of the number of hours I've wasted on this classic. Even my wife succumbed to the charms of James Bond, and most nights were lost playing this classic shooter. An instant multiplayer classic that's a delight to play"**

Darran Jones

## BY THE NUMBERS



BEST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER




# GOLDENEYE 007

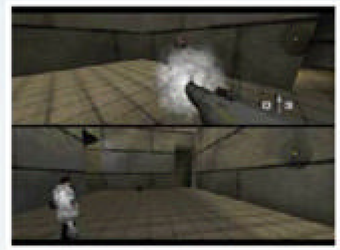
**DEVELOPER:** Rare **YEAR:** 1997

*GoldenEye 007* is the multiplayer game that we almost didn't get. It's crazy to think that one of the most beloved multiplayer games of all time was a single-player game for most of its development – but that's the truth. It wasn't until late in development that the beloved deathmatch mode was added, and only then as an afterthought. You wouldn't have known it though, as *GoldenEye* was perhaps the best-realised multiplayer game of its era. As well as featuring a variety of excellent maps and weapons, the game featured a variety of excellent and thematically appropriate gameplay variants, from the two-life shootout of You Only Live Twice mode to the powerful one-hit kill action of The Man With The Golden Gun mode.

The impact of *GoldenEye* is hard to overstate, too. It's worth remembering that when *GoldenEye* arrived, many players were still not tremendously familiar with first-person shooters. While the likes of *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* had popularised the genre on PC, console players had only recently begun to receive such games frequently – and even then, *Doom* had only had link cable multiplayer on PlayStation, greatly limiting its audience. *GoldenEye* didn't just offer an uncommon split-screen option in a fairly exotic genre, but justified the N64's inclusion of four control ports in the process.

Much of *GoldenEye*'s appeal is in the peripheral stuff beyond the core experience. The cheats seem just as valid an addition as the main modes, with big heads and paintball genuinely adding to the experience – and if you don't believe us, just ask anyone who has disguised a mine with paint splatters. Meanwhile screen-cheating, the act of looking at your opponent's display to figure out their location, is such an integral part of the genre that there's now a whole game based on it. While *GoldenEye*'s golden formula developed through *Perfect Dark* and the *Timesplitters* series, it's the original that still commands the most love among multiplayer enthusiasts, and we'd still gladly invite any of you to grab a pad and indulge in some Power Weapons action. Just don't be *that* guy and pick Oddjob. Nobody likes that guy.

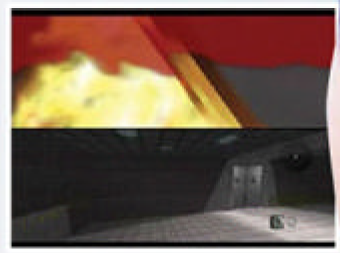
## BEAT YOUR FRIENDS



1 Aim your Rocket Launcher at the opponent's feet – it's easier to kill your opponent with a rocket's blast radius rather than hit them.



2 Avoid running in patterns. Try to vary your routes through the level, and zigzag around when you are being chased.



3 Memorise the level layouts. It sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised how often our own Proximity Mines have killed us…




## KEY MOMENTS

You've split the honours, a dozen games each, but it's now stupid o'clock in the morning and your friend suggests a decider: Slappers Only, Licence To Kill. The silliest of game modes has you both running around trying to lethally karate chop one another, while laughing like lunatics.





# Side Pocket

"THE BALLS ROLL FUNNY FOR EVERYBODY"

» RETROREVIVAL




» **MEGA DRIVE » DATA EAST » 1992**

**I never played the original arcade version of *Side Pocket*.** In fact, I had no idea that it was even an arcade game until I owned the Mega Drive version. What I do know, though, is that, regardless of the format, Data East's game is a hell of a lot of fun to play with a friend, often for completely unintentional reasons.

Take the main players for example. They're clearly bad caricatures of Paul Newman and Tom Cruise's characters from *The Colour Of Money*, which always tickles me. Once upon a time videogame publishers would happily 'borrow' the likenesses of famous people without having to worry about paying for their actual image likeness and having Tom Cruise and Paul Newman in the game clearly made a lot of sense to the developers. Of less sense is the main game, which we think revolves around travelling across America and competing against beautiful women. Well, we assume you're competing against them as otherwise you're just being treated to gratuitous shots of ladies at the start of each level for absolutely no good reason.

It's the physics that really catapult *Side Pocket*'s playability, though, particularly when played against a friend. They're quite simply rubbish, with the balls having minds of their own and behaving in completely odd fashions. While this does grate a little in single player mode, it becomes hilarious when you are competing against a friend, as you'll burst out laughing when their carefully placed and meticulously planned shot goes to shit.

*Side Pocket* might not deliver a truly authentic version of pool, far from it in fact, but it does deliver a fun one and, ultimately, that's what really matters. ★

# REBELS

**There's a series of games in Julian Gollop's impressive catalogue that outsold all of his other 8-bit work and were critical in developing his later efforts such as Laser Squad and the X-COM games. Graeme Mason cowers behind a combat droid and chats to the legendary game designer about all things Rebelstar…**

**We start the story of *Rebelstar* not with Julian Gollop, but two gentleman by** the name of Helmut Watson and Julian Fuller. In 1983, like many other entrepreneurs of the era, Fuller and Watson began a computer software company. They called it Red Shift.

Red Shift was designed to exploit what the two men thought was a gap in the market: strategy games. Going against a legion of arcade rip-offs and platformers was a brave gamble and one that inevitably did not succeed. But rather prophetically, its first game, *Apocalypse*, was based on a popular board game of the same name. Fellow strategy experts, MC Lothlorien (**Retro Gamer** issue 129) realised it needed a line of arcade games to help fund its more cerebral titles. Lacking either the nous, willingness or funds to follow this ideal, Red Shift soldiered on with pure strategy titles and didn't make it past 1985. Yet the previous year had seen it release two games that would jump-start the career of the man whose name is still whispered in exaltation among many Spectrum fans. "A friend of mine had been involved with Red Shift since its beginning," remembers Julian Gollop, "and the guys were all part of the Harlow wargaming scene. Me? I was still at school when it all started."

As he has famously recounted many times, Julian himself was also heavily involved with tabletop gaming, thanks to titles such as *Sniper* from SPI and Avalon's *Squad Leader*. "Going back to around 1980," he says, "we played hex encounter board games and using miniature figurines as well. My friends and I used to play sci-fi games using various rule systems." Around the same time, Julian also began to take an interest in a new and

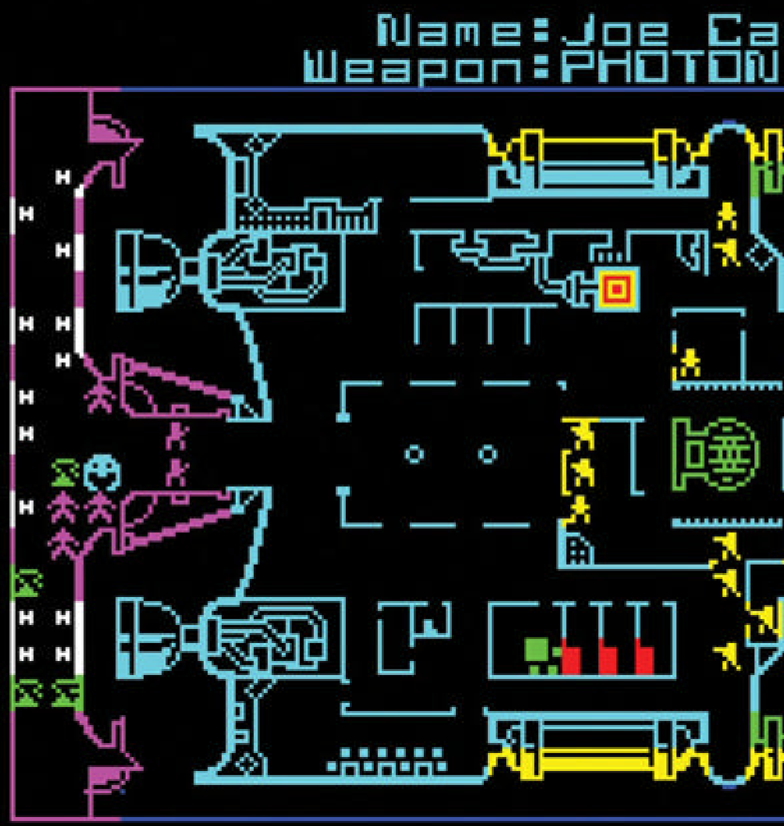



STAR

fascinating world: computers. "What I really wanted to do was to implement something like these games on a computer. So I came up with the idea of a two-player combat game, set over three scenarios from different periods of history, and I called it *Combat Commander*." Scenario one was set in medieval times with the players attacking and defending a castle. Scenario two was World War II-based, and, of course, there was the predestined sci-fi map. "But the guys at Red Shift said I should make them all sci-fi based," recalls Julian, "which I did. But the core idea remained the same: a tactical individual-level scale game, similar to what I had been playing with board games." With the change to uniformly science fiction scenarios, an alteration to the name was also required. And so, the *Rebelstar* universe was born.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Raiders'* level, Moonbase, formed the basis for Julian's follow up.

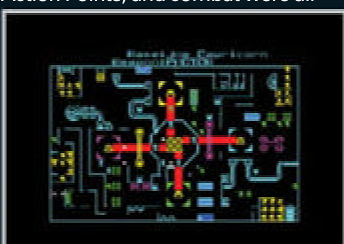



» [ZX Spectrum] Mission complete, the Raiders now need to defend their position.

> "A lot of strategy games back then were pretty dull actually"
> Julian Gollop

***Rebelstar Raiders*, for the ZX Spectrum, was written solely by Julian, in BASIC, in under four** months during a year out from school. Like many similar games of the era, he designed the maps on paper first. "I had something called a 'pixel pad', which was squared graph paper based on 8x8 character grids," he recounts. "I tried to make recognisable shapes, for example the space ship map had to look something like a space ship." In an unrefined way, many of the gameplay mechanics of the later games began here. Multiple units, Action Points, and combat were all present and needed to be mastered should the Raiders succeed in their mission. *Rebelstar Raiders* takes place in the 25th Century, a time when megacorporations have taken over from governments with the most powerful being the Red Shift Trans-Galactic Co-Operative, and no sign of a saviour named Buck Rogers. Developing a programme of extensive robotic development, the Red Shift corporation's ultimate creation was a proto-brain computer called Main-Comp. Only the fools made their machine a little too clever; when was brought online, it enslaved or killed all but one of the Red Shift leaders. Now that one surviving member, Joe Capricorn, has cloned himself and leads three teams of mercenaries, defectors and pirates against the tyranny of the Main-Comp. Your destiny awaits.

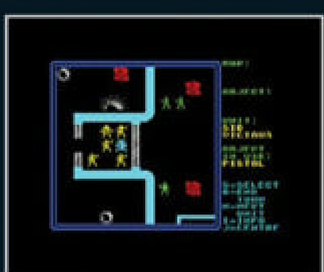
*Rebelstar Raiders* was one of two games coded for the ZX Spectrum by Julian for Red Shift (the other being *Nebula*) and he designed two more BBC games for the ill-fated developer, *Timelords* and *Islandia*. Even in these



» [ZX Spectrum] The malevolent computer in the centre of level two of *Rebelstar Raiders*.

## MEET THE TEAMS

For the character names in the original *Rebelstar*, Julian drew on a number of figures, either from real life or popular fiction. Meanwhile, his student politics were aptly demonstrated with the Raiders Billy Bragg and Leon Trotsky, who both sported deadly laser weaponry rather than Marxist dogma. On a lighter note, *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*'s Slartibartfast made a semi-appearance as Slarty Bartfast (sic), as did, Jim DiGriz, or as he is more commonly known: The Stainless Steel Rat. When it came to the human operatives, inspiration seemed sparce for Julian as characters such as Tom, Bill, Fred and Harry were charged with defending the moonbase, assisted by The Sex Pistols' Sid Vicious and the delightfully-named Stike Vomit. But for the Raiders, the most important two characters were Leeder (sic) Krenon and Kurt Levine, for they both came armed with a photon – a rapid-fire laser gun. Clever deployment of these two characters made a difference in the battle for the moonbase.



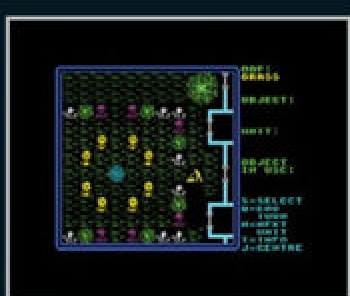


early days of 1984, the small company lacked the funds to adequately push its products, and although *Rebelstar Raiders* received good reviews, its slow gameplay and less-than-friendly interface did not endear it to those Spectrum fans who preferred their games to be instantly accessible and exciting. Julian took note, and after crafting the popular wizard battle game, *Chaos: The Battle Of Wizards*, he turned his mind back to the sci-fi two-player tactical theme.

"I started *Chaos* while Red Shift was still in existence," notes Julian, "but by the time I had finished it Red Shift was gone, so the game was published by Games Workshop. After that, I began work straight away on *Rebelstar*." Julian's main aims with the new game were to introduce a better map and update the combat. "I really wanted to add a larger scrolling map area [*Rebelstar Raiders* was single screen] which would allow for larger characters, and a more sophisticated shooting system." In essence this meant the game would have two maps: a symbolic representation of the battlefield and a line-of-sight map, where all the characters were replaced with circular blobs. In a plot reminiscent of its predecessor, *Rebelstar* starred, once more, those refractory Raiders as they attempted to destroy another supercomputer, this time, ISAAC, an electronic intelligence responsible for breaking all of the rebel's codes. In the Raiders' way stands an elite defence force known as the Operatives. "The line-of-sight map was a bit of an innovation," says Julian, "because it was a more accurate representation of what could be hit and what couldn't. It didn't actually check your line-of-sight – the player had to evaluate carefully what they could target and actually hit, meaning there was an element of skill there as well." In addition to the dual maps, Julian was also determined to ensure *Rebelstar* was more accessible than the first game. Out went *Rebelstar Raiders*' somewhat confusing multiple control methods and in came a simple circle of keys for movement and logically-mapped other functions such as 'F' for fire and 'I' for inventory. "A lot of strategy games back then were pretty dull, actually," smiles Julian, "so I felt strong combined strategy and arcade elements



» [Amstrad] This version of *Rebelstar* gave a very useful mission briefing, which added to the atmosphere..



» [ZX Spectrum] Why not take a break from all that dangerous laser fire and mow the lawn?

# ESSENTIAL GOLLOP

Seven Gollop games you must play

## REBELSTAR



Firebird's *Rebelstar* took the template laid down by the *Red Shift* original and added an arcade sheen to proceedings. Gone were the confusing modes and clunky firing system and in came a targeting map for combat and a cleaner, more accessible interface.

## CHAOS



Originally released by the computer game branch of Games Workshop, *Chaos: The Battle Of Wizards* didn't succeed thanks to the publisher leaving the market shortly after its release. A re-issue by Firebird did help the game reach a much wider audience, though.

## REBELSTAR II: ALIEN ENCOUNTER



*Alien Encounter* had enough improvements and variation, despite being based on *Rebelstar*'s engine. A crowded map as well as a strict turn limit meant there was no skulking in the shadows and waiting for the enemy.

## LASER SQUAD



Without doubt the pinnacle of 8-bit turn-based combat gaming. Featuring a line-of-sight mechanic for the first time, *Laser Squad* also included loadout options and multiple missions. But without Julian's experience on *Rebelstar*, it undoubtedly wouldn't exist.

## LORDS OF CHAOS



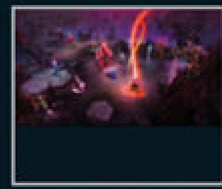
Using his own company, Target Games, Julian took another of his classics and updated it into a fresher and more expansive game. Now a battle of up to four wizards, players could choose their own spells beforehand and the game had a similar graphical style to *Laser Squad*.

## UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN



Known as *X-COM: UFO Defense* in the United States, *Enemy Unknown* was coded for the PC by Julian and his brother. The game had two distinct sections: a planetary view where the player could send out transports to intercept UFOs and the ground combat itself.

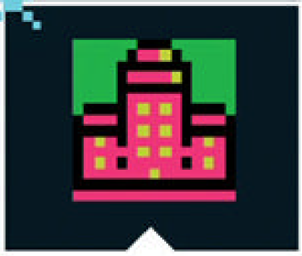
## CHAOS REBORN



At the time of writing, this further update of Julian's classic game is still awaiting a release, but there's no doubting that the combination of *Chaos*' classic core gameplay and modern gaming tenets such as online multiplayer and free-roaming maps is an exciting mix.

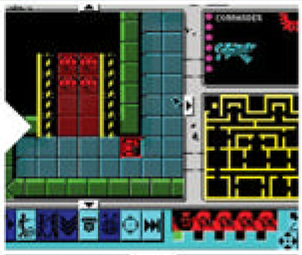
# WHOSE TURN IS IT ANYWAY?

Spreading the tactical combat love



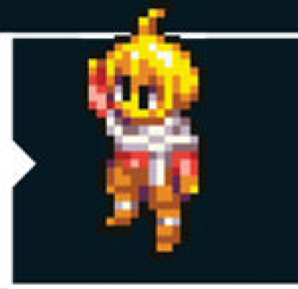
## SPACE CRUSADE 1992

Sharing not only the space theme, but also the 8-bit origins of *Rebelstar*, *Space Crusade* was based on a board game of the same name. Each level involved infiltrating an enemy spaceship and taking out its inhabitants.



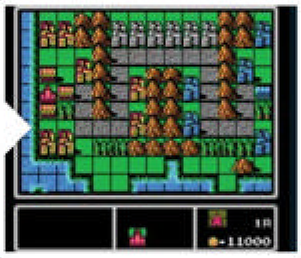
## FINAL FANTASY TACTICS 1997

Released in 1997, this game was a brave move by Squaresoft. It combined the tactical combat and RPG genres, risking alienation of fans from both sides. Luckily, the gamble paid off.



## FAMICOM WARS 1988

Produced by Gunpei Yokoi, *Famicom Wars* has colourful factions going head-to-head in a battle for enemy-held positions, dictated by the deployment of enemy forces from home cities.

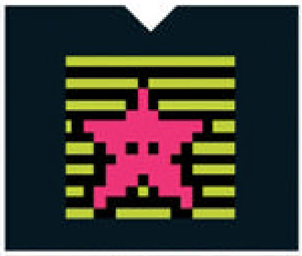






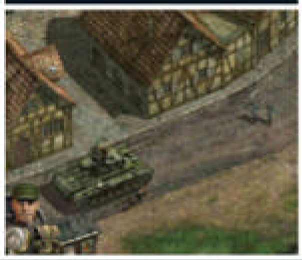

## ADVANCE WARS (2001)

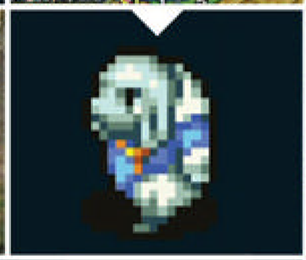
In 2001, the Japanese *Wars* series finally made it to western shores with this successful GBA title, and it was from here the tactical combat genre found a new home with Nintendo's handheld platforms.



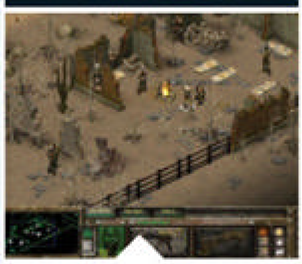
## COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES (1998)

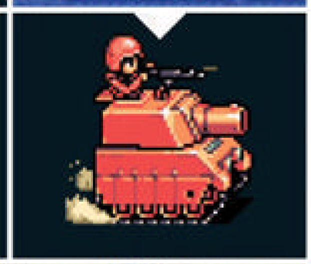
The success of the RTS genre in the mid-Nineties meant that tactical combat games took a step into simultaneous play. *Commandos* was a rather big hit as a result of this.





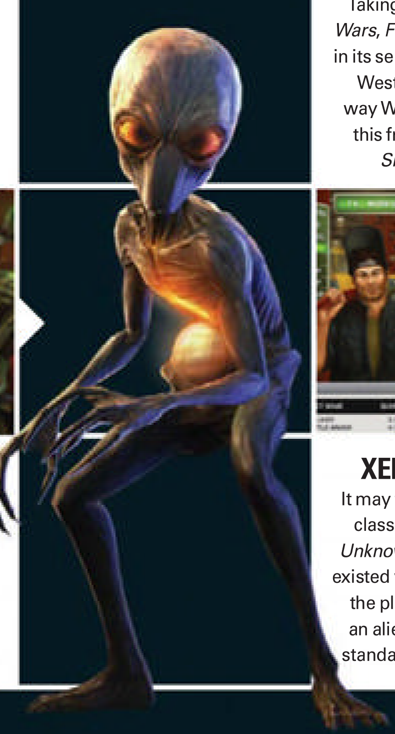






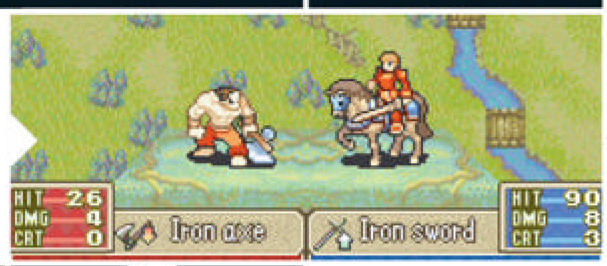
## FALLOUT TACTICS (2001)

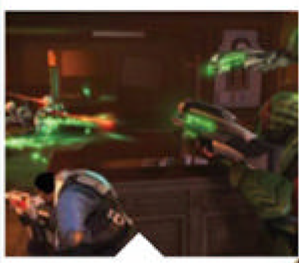
After *Fallout* and its sequel had cemented the post-apocalyptic series' popularity, *Fallout Tactics* simplified many of its predecessors' RPG elements while emphasising some brilliant tactical combat.

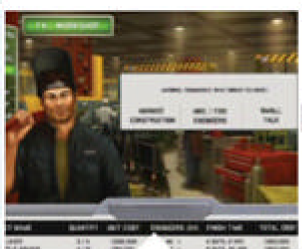


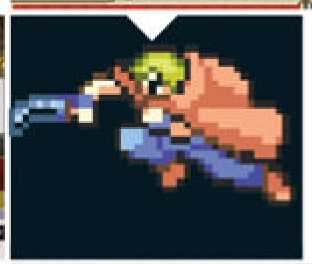
## FIRE EMBLEM (2003)

Taking its cue from *Advance Wars*, *Fire Emblem* was the first in its series to be released in the West. Prev ously, the only way Westerners experienced this franchise was in *Super Smash Bros. Melee*.







## CALL OF CTHULHU: THE WASTED LAND (2012)

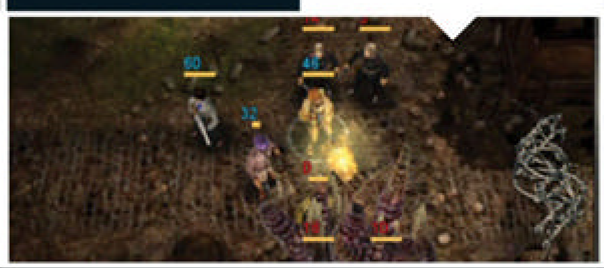
With its novel setting (World War One) and supernatural slant, *Wasted Land* persuaded many mobile gamers to take the dip into the tactical combat genre.

## XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN (2012)

This reboot of the classic PC game was met with high praise when released. The player once more galloped around the world tracking down alien intruders in multiple tactical combat scenes.

## XENONAUTS (2014)

It may take a cue from Julian's classic series, *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, but it wouldn't have existed without *Rebelstar*. Again the player is pitched against an alien menace using a  the standard isometric viewpoint.



would make the game much more successful."

Julian had begun work on *Rebelstar* during his summer break of his first year at college, and the year was 1985. "I distinctly remember debugging code manually on the Spectrum printer while watching Live Aid," he recalls. Having learned machine code, programming the game initially proved simple, especially as he had the experience of working on a very similar game. But some parts did prove troublesome to the young coder. "I was worried about the scrolling map system," he remembers, "because that needed to be fast enough. It was still a bit flickery but it just about worked. So I had this idea that you moved the cursor around and that would push the screen and scroll it when you went to the edge and that worked nicely." Once more, Julian relied upon square paper for the genesis of his map, and this proved a laborious process. "I wrote a little map editor for the map data and after designing the map on paper, I used this to put all the bits there. There's a printout somewhere of all the sections, glued together on paper." Julian also added more to the scenario by including items that could be picked up (coffee tokens, lawnmowers etc.) although these proved to be irrelevant to the main game. "They were just silly things that I added, and they weren't really part of the game, especially if you were under pressure from the enemy. But maybe you could have given yourself a challenge, buy coffee for all your soldiers, mow the lawn and win the game at the same time," he says with a wry smile. Like the original, the maths for combat worked on percentages. "There were data values, so snapshots would have an Action Point cost as a proportion of the character's total Action Point allowance. These were all set by data that I had created, basically." With the larger map allowing for clearer and more impressive graphics, Julian felt that the Raiders were ready once more for the outside world.

**"I spent two weeks in my room working on the AI for Rebelstar"**
Julian Gollop

The young student took the game to Telecomsoft, purely on the basis that its offices were very close to his college halls of residence, a ten-minute walk, in fact. "I was living on Tottenham Court Road and its offices were on New Oxford Street. I showed off *Rebelstar* but it was two-player only at this point and Telecomsoft said it had to have a single-player version." The software house's reasoning was sound: the majority of Spectrum gamers played alone. Two-player games existed, but sales were likely to be a fraction of any single-player game. "I hadn't intended to do [single-player] as I assumed it was too difficult to do," says Julian. "But I spent the first two weeks locked in my room working on the AI."

Ah, AI, a facet of videogames that even today, some developers struggle to harness. "I think I had about two or three bytes of memory to squeeze the AI in," recalls Julian, "and I had to store a table in there to store the route finding. There wasn't really a lot of room for actual intelligence." Once finalised, Julian realised there were inevitable loopholes in the Spectrum's pathfinding routines and logic, so in order to make the game a more viable one-player challenge, the operatives were duly upgraded. Out went the human characters of the two-player game and in came an army of powerful robots, many of which could kill a raider with just one deadly laser shot. "Also, having robots in the one-player game was more suggestive of computer control," says Julian, "plus, of course, I wanted to load the AI's firepower to make up for its weakness." The most commonly exploited AI flaw was the 'draw' tactic where the player could penetrate the moonbase via its south airlock, thereby instigating a mass enemy rush towards this section of the base, leaving the remainder of the *Rebelstar* forces free to attack ISAAC virtually unmolested. Nevertheless, considering the memory and time Julian had to work with, it remains an impressive feat, although *Rebelstar* truly shone in its original two-player mode, a sure-fire way to kill an afternoon with a friend.

Pleased with the result, Telecomsoft placed the game on its £1.99 budget range. "I was kinda hoping it'd put it on its Silverbird £2.99 range at least," says Julian, "but it obviously didn't think it was that brilliant. But it sold pretty well. I think my first royalty cheque was for £6000 so it sold at least 60,000 units in the first two months, which was pretty good for a game back then, especially on only one format."

» [Amstrad] Julian also coded a quick Amstrad port of *Rebelstar*.






» [ZX Spectrum] These handy repair pads in *Rebelstar* greatly boosted a robot's defence.



» [ZX Spectrum] Your ultimate target in *Rebelstar* – the powerful ISAAC supercomputer.




» [ZX Spectrum] The operatives of Firebird's *Rebelstar* had access to a useful armoury.



» [ZX Spectrum] Julian refined the AI to *Rebelstar II* as the aliens hid behind cover and used opportunity fire.

Telecomsoft's insistence on a single-player game clearly paid off, although Julian's big regret with *Rebelstar* remains the pressure he devised the AI under. "It was done very quickly, and would have been much better if I'd thought about it in advance. But Telecomsoft were correct, it made the game a much more viable commercial product, it's just I didn't think I could do it, and was hard-pressed when I did."

After release, Julian coded a relatively simple Amstrad port for Telecomsoft and sold them *Chaos*, which became another big hit for its budget label. Compared to the majority of budget games, his output represented ridiculously good value for money. "After the success of *Rebelstar* Telecomsoft was much more amenable to anything I could give it," recalls Julian, "and I'm not sure who proposed *Rebelstar II*, I think it may have been me. I saw [the sequel] as a way to earn a bit more money to help finance my next full time work as a game developer: *Laser Squad*." Having left college early, the success of *Rebelstar* had persuaded Julian that a career in videogames could be his path in life. "The first thing I did was apply for a job at Virgin Games, can't remember whether it was as an artist or programmer, because the role of games designer didn't exist back then. I had an interview, but didn't get the job. Then a friend, Ian Terry, proposed the idea of setting up a company together to make games." Julian agreed and they named the company Target Games. Its initial big release was to be *Laser Squad* – but first Julian asked Ian to help him complete, as it was soon known, *Rebelstar II: Alien Encounter*.

**Taking note of some of *Rebelstar's* gameplay** weaknesses, for its sequel Julian was determined to create a stiffer single-player challenge. His first move was to deny the Raiders the opportunity to camp, and then assault the enemy at their leisure. "The game needed something to stop the player using AI workaround tactics," admits Julian, "so I added time pressure on the player; you had to take some calculated risks if you were to succeed." *Rebelstar II* introduced a fresh mission, new

# THE LEXICON OF REBELSTAR

## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

**ACTION POINTS** – A number of points given to each unit, affected by injuries, morale and tiredness.

**AIMED SHOT** – A precise shot, but it consumes a lot of Action Points.

**CONSTITUTION** – Or in other words, hit points.

**DEFENCE LASER** – Three of these are situated to the south of the moonbase in the original *Rebelstar*. Destroy them and reinforcements roll in to help you.

**FIRE MODE** – *Rebelstar*'s 'second' map that turns all characters into targetable blobs.

**MORALE** – Each unit's morale can dip if it sees too many of its comrades slain in battle.

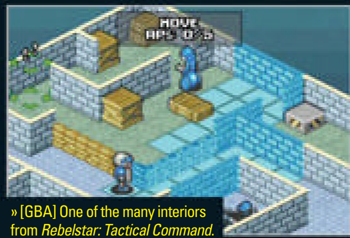
**LAWNMOWER** – A tool for cutting the grass, obviously.

**OPPORTUNITY FIRE** – A timed shot, set during the players turn, that will automatically fire in the opponents turn should an enemy wander into the character's line of fire.

**SNAPSHOT** – A quick shot that uses fewer Action Points but it has considerably less chance of hitting its intended target.

**WEAPON SKILL** – A simple multiplier that helps to determine the success rate of a fired shot.

enemies, some familiar faces and a strict turn limit. Threatened by a vicious alien species, the Rebelstar Raiders have taken the fight to their nemesis and landed on the alien home planet. Arriving behind several metres of thick undergrowth, the heroes battle their way through a hostile environment to the alien base. Once there they must defeat the enemy, particularly the alien queen, which is laying the eggs that produce further alien soldiers. The eggs are also key to the overall war; it is vital that some of them are stolen so they can be studied and future methods of combating the aliens potentially revealed.


» [GBA] One of the many interiors from *Rebelstar: Tactical Command.*


» [GBA] Some nefarious goings-on underground.


» [GBA] *Rebelstar: Tactical Command* introduced several new weapons such as explosives.

**If the plot to *Rebelstar II* failed to reveal one of Julian's prime influences, the cover of the game would surely dispel all** doubt, with its depiction of a Giger-esque alien soldier in menacing pose over a clutch of ominously bulging eggs. "*Aliens* was my favourite film at the time," admits Julian, "and it was my homage to it. The game had a little bit of story behind it, where you had to steal the eggs, get into the dropship and escape the planet – all within a certain amount of turns." *Rebelstar II* utilised principally the same code from the original game, with a modicum of tweaks from Julian and Ian. The addition of a final score counter also added to the tension – each side was allocated points at the end of the game with the rebels gaining extra points for the more eggs they stole and the aliens for each human they killed. Instead of setting themselves simulated targets such as mowing the lawn, the player could now try and complete the game without losing a team member, or stealing all the eggs, thus improving their score.

Despite being better-designed and a tougher challenge, *Rebelstar*'s sequel didn't prove to be as successful as the original, most likely due to the start of the Spectrum's decline. "I liked *Rebelstar II*," says Julian, "as it had cool asymmetric combat with the hi-tech marines up against a numerous, deadly and elusive alien menace. But we were thinking of *Laser Squad* as we were doing it. We knew that line-of-sight systems and hidden enemies was

## "Rebelstar II was just intended to be a stopgap"
Julian Gollop

something that made these computer-based tactics games better than the board games, so that was the objective for the next game. I think that was a significant factor, and the biggest one; but *Rebelstar II* was just intended to be a stopgap." *Laser Squad* proved to be a step-up from the *Rebelstar* games thanks to its hidden enemies, equipment choices and multiple scenarios. Julian never intended for there to be a third *Rebelstar* game, well, until an opportunity arose in 2004.

"Myself and Nick (my brother) went to a meeting with Namco," recalls Julian, "it was thinking about setting up a studio in the UK. We pitched working on a remake of *X-COM*, which it declined, but at the meeting the guy responsible for their Game Boy Advance publishing said they had a free slot for a GBA game." Julian pitched an update of the *Rebelstar* series with the subtitle of *Tactical Command*. Not being experienced on the Nintendo handheld proved to be a challenge, especially as Namco insisted on a development time of just eight months. In terms of gameplay, *Tactical Command* was an amalgamation of several of Julian's previous games. Using the refined combat and weapon loadout choice of *Laser Squad* and the graphical style of his later *X-COM* games, once more the player took control of a squad of six soldiers who must repel an invading alien menace. Action Points, turn-based gameplay, snapshots and opportunity fire all remained key features (although the latter was now rebranded 'Overwatch') while elements such as experience and levelling up added a new dimension to the series. After its release, Julian proposed a sequel Nintendo's newer DS console, with artist Gez Frey even providing concept art for the pitch. Unfortunately Namco's producer saw the game as more of a PSP title. "We didn't feel confident doing that on our own," says Julian.

Today, despite its relative lack of admirers compared to *Chaos* and the *X-Com* games, Julian considers the original *Rebelstar* games to be a key part of his development as a programmer. "I think it was a major stepping stone for me, because it was very popular and was actually the second game I had to code AI – there was also a very basic AI in *Chaos*. And it did inspire me to believe that there was more that could be done here, which is how we moved on to *Laser Squad*. In a way, *Rebelstar* is an easier game to play, with a bit more accessible and usability. The simplicity of the controls and the skill element of the targeting was also cool. Simple, but it worked well." ★



» [GBA] As with all the *Rebelstar* games, skilfully using cover in the GBA game was essential.

Our thanks to Julian for his time.

READY-PRESS ANY KEY TO BEGIN

# TEXAS INSTRUMENTS TI-99

**The Texas Instruments TI-99 series represents a classic story of a computer that had the best intentions, hardware elements that would influence a generation and a powerful company to support it. Marty Goldberg shows you that in the end, though, it wasn't enough**

When **Retro Gamer** readers think of Texas, they most likely think of a European's stereotypical view of the US's second largest state: Western cowboys, big oil, and shoot from the hip Presidents like Lyndon B. Johnson and the Bushes. Texas was also a major hub in the personal computer industry, particularly in the late Seventies and early Eighties, due to electronic companies like Texas Instruments and electronics suppliers such as Radio Shack. It was from Texas Instruments (TI) that a once considerable player in that nascent personal computer industry sprung from: the TI-99 line of computers. Our story begins in the Seventies, when TI was starting to expand into consumer electronics.

TI was founded by the likes of Cecil H. Green, J. Erik Johnson, Eugene McDermott and Patrick E. Haggerty in 1951 and worked primarily in defence contracts. In 1954 TI also designed and manufactured the first transistor radio, based on a new form of transistor that it introduced earlier that very year – a silicon based transistor. That was followed up later on in 1958 with another important invention: the integrated circuit (a design that earned its inventor, Jack Kirby, a Nobel Prize in Physics in 2000).

It was in 1961 when TI built the world's first integrated circuit computer, which was constructed for the US Air Force. That was followed by the creation of the 7400 series of TTL logic chips in 1964, which became the industry standard of logic chips for mainframe and minicomputers of the late Sixties and the early Seventies, as well the chips that helped launch videogames in the arcades. Most early arcade games from *Computer Space* to *Breakout* relied heavily on these logic chips.

In 1967 TI invented the handheld electronic calculator, becoming the standard manufacturer of circuitry for the exploding portable calculator industry. It was followed by its invention of the microprocessor in 1971, the 4-bit TMS1802/0100 – though that credit often goes to Intel for its 4004 microprocessor, TI's TMS 0100 microcontroller or 'calculator on a chip' was introduced a month before. It was the latter that lead to it cementing its hold on the industry, manufacturing the parts for calculators by Toshiba, Heathkit, and Commodore Business Machines. It was, in fact, the latter that would come back to haunt the company, as when TI decided to join in on the Japanese calculator onslaught and heavily enter the market on its own, it forced Jack Tramiel's company to leave the industry by the late Seventies.


Applications Software
TEXAS INSTRUMENTS
TI-99/4
color monitor
OFF-ON
VOL
FUEL
000100
LIFT 3
TOP 000000
Tunnels of Doom
TEXAS INSTRUMENTS
TI-99/4
home computer
TUNNELS OF DOOM
SPACE
SHIFT
ENTER



» Texas Instruments released several TI-99 variants. This one is the enhanced TI-99/4A model.

Releasing more calculators, followed by digital watches and clocks, TI's move into manufacturing and selling its own calculators was no mistake. The company was making a concerted effort to move further into the consumer electronics industry with its own products, no longer content to just make the parts used by everyone else. It was two products based on the TMS1000 family of 4-bit microcontrollers (itself introduced in 1974) that got TI's feet wet in the educational electronics field of consumer electronics. The first was the *Little Professor*, a game playing calculator targeting children that was released in 1976. The second was *Speak & Spell* in 1978, a device that pioneered the use of synthesised speech and had its origins several years earlier.

In 1974, TI had set up a program called IDEA to fund and test creative ideas before it went through the formal process for new research and development projects. A team (consisting of Richard Wiggins, Paul Breedlove, Larry Brantingham and Gene Frantz) in TI's Consumer Products division wanted to see if a speech synthesizer could handle speech data, which they in turn wanted to use for new product ideas.

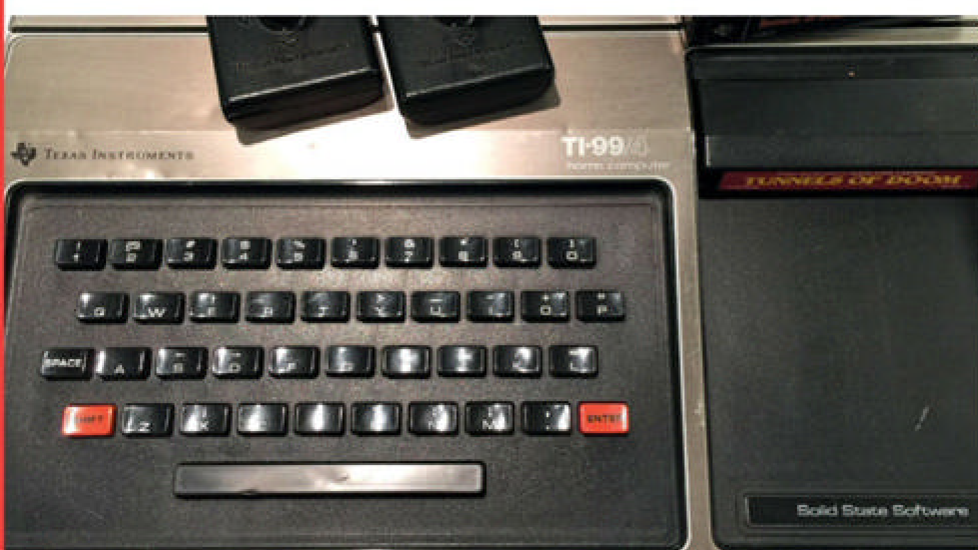
Most of the research team didn't think it was possible, except Richard, who had only been on the project for a mere two weeks. Ralph Dosher, the IDEA manager for the Consumer Products division, approved $25,000 to test the concept with Gene, who was named the project leader. Starting towards the end of the year they soon demonstrated that the concept was, in fact, viable. Their speech synthesis function required that 200,000 additions and 200,000 multiplications be performed in about one second, which called for the creation of a new type of chip – a Digital Signal Processor. From these efforts rose the *Speak & Spell*, run on the 4-bit TMS1000 microcontroller (soon to be in everything from board games to electronic games such as *Simon*), two 128kb ROMs to store the words used, and the speech synthesis chip that made it all possible, the TMS5100. *Speak & Spell* was the first commercial use of digital signal processing technology in a consumer product and it was followed up by the Speak & Read and the Speak & Math, becoming an iconic part of the education of youth around the world.

With the path TI was blazing and the entry of companies like Commodore into the new computer market the year before, it was obvious the next step TI had to take was a to make a new computer.

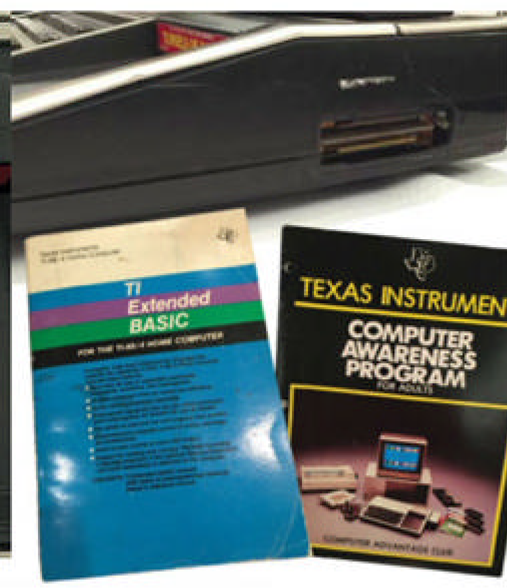
> "Within months the price of the computer was dropped down to $375 by William Turner"
>
> Texas Instruments priced its machine too high

**In 1975 TI had introduced its second generation microprocessor, the TMS9900, hoping to jump over the competition with a 16-bit punch. Unfortunately, it didn't repeat the strong sales its predecessor 1000 family was enjoying. The market was strong for 8-bit microprocessors,** with an even stronger demand for lower cost ones. Consequently it soon flopped in the marketplace.

Instead of letting it die, TI came up with the solution to build a consumer computer around it. And so it was that in 1977 the Consumer Products group was given the assignment of coming up with a new computer and was also given a brand new headquarters in Lubbock, Texas to do it in. The Consumer Products group came up with a plan to build not one, but



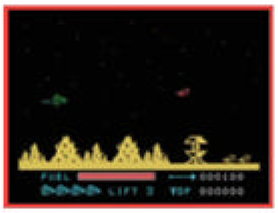

» The TI-99/4 was unable to use lowercase letters. This was updated for when the TI-99/4A was released.




» There were a number of add-ons for the TI-99/4, including a RF Modulator and Speech Synthesizer.

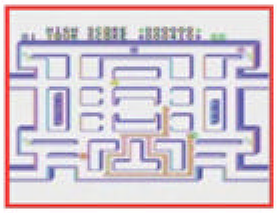
# FIVE ESSENTIAL GAMES

**The TI-99 games you shouldn't be without**



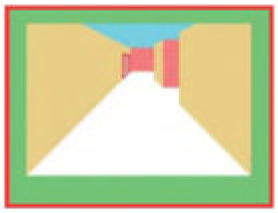
### PARSEC 1982

A side-scrolling shooter in the vein of *Cosmic Avenger*, you pilot a ship that must shoot everything down while cruising an alien landscape and watching your limited fuel. The game gets an extra dimension when used with the computer's optional speech synthesis module, making your ship's 'computer' come alive thanks to the digitized voice of Texas Tech University student, Aubree Anderson.



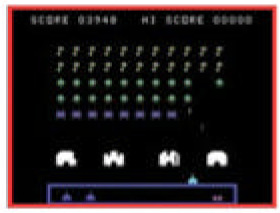
### MUNCH MAN 1982

One of the more standout *Pac-Man* clones on any platform. The prototype version had Munch Man gobbling dots and power pellets, but the lawsuit launched by Atari at Magnavox in 1981 for their own *Pac-Man* clone scared TI. In the final version, instead of eating dots, Munch Man lays out a chain down each passage. The goal being to lay chains out across the entire maze without getting eaten.



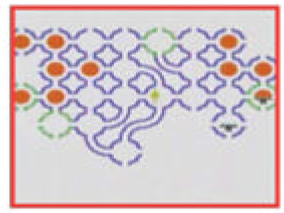
### TUNNELS OF DOOM 1982

A RPG that combines 2D and 3D gameplay and is loosely based off of *Dungeons & Dragons*. You control up to four characters from any of four different classes as you explore a dungeon. *Tunnels Of Doom* uses first-person 3D for dungeon navigation and a 2D map when actually exploring a room, all in a manner similar to the Intellivision's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Cloudy Mountain*.



### TI INVADERS 1981

An excellent clone of *Space Invaders*. It expands upon the original by adding skill levels, 'Merely Aggressive' and 'Downright Nasty'. It also adds a bonus round where you hit the saucer repeatedly as many times as you can until the saucer shrinks into nothing or manages to escape; and a plethora of different invader shapes that start to replace the more traditional invaders each new level.



### HUNT THE WUMPUS 1980

The classic mainframe game given a graphical makeover. The original game was written in BASIC in 1972 by Gregory Yob at Dartmouth University when he wanted to create a map based dungeon crawler. Hunting a creature called the Wumpus from room to unknown room while avoiding pits and killer bats, you try and kill said Wumpus by shooting an arrow from the next room.



» The TI-99/4 was launched late and rose in price to $1,150, making it an expensive system.

three different computers using the 9900 microprocessor in an effort to hit all three developing segments of the computer market. A $7000 business computer would start out the high-end, followed by a middle-end scientific calculator at $1000, and a low-end home computer in the $350 range. Keep in mind that up to that point you had mainly hobbyist computers in the home market, computers for tech people to tinker with at home. TI, in contrast, was interested in bringing an entry level computer for the common man or woman.

Unfortunately, internal politics and other happenings lead to the trio of products to soon become a single one. After a management shuffle in 1978, the new project head decided the home computer needed to be for industrial as well as home use, and the machine became a $1150 machine instead of a $400 one. It was a move that delayed the computer, which had been expected to be out by mid 1979, to now be out in early 1980. Named the TI-99/4, it flopped by being expensive for consumers and under designed as a product. The 99/4's keyboard became the most obvious shortfall. Instead of the typewriter style that others who had entered the market in the interim were using, it used a calculator style keyboard with stubby keys. Why? Because most of the engineers who designed it had formerly been designing calculators.

Add to that the fact that it was slow, even with a 16-bit processor, it had a closed system that cut out outside developers, it was hard for the average home user to use and write programs for, the Consumer Division had to pay the Chip Division $20 a chip (at a time when 8-bit chips cost around $4) to make up for the low outside demand, and in 1980 TI basically dropped a bomb on the market… and not in a good way. The main plus was that it introduced the use of TI's line of Video Display Processors, the 9918 family, versions of which would be used in game consoles such as the ColecoVision, Sega Master System and Mega Drive, as well as the MSX computer standard. Likewise, the various software was rather easy to load via its cartridge-based 'Solid State Software'.

It was a four-year project that cost $10 million, and when Autumn came along TI were selling fewer than a 1000 TI-99/4s a month. TI realised it needed to hit the drawing board again and fix the problem, fast. A lot of the engineers wanted to cut out TI's processor and use the Zilog Z-80 in order to shave costs and make the system more competitive. Another competing design, called The Ranger, also grew out of the redesign process, which mainly addressed the TI-99's use of the side carriage expansion port that could result in a ridiculously long chain of peripherals off the right side of the computer. Internal politics took over again, though, and both designs were scrapped in favour of sticking with the TI-99's internals but redesigning the case and keyboard.

Introduced in June of 1981, the $550 TI-99/4A was essentially the TI-99/4 upgraded with a full keyboard, 16K of RAM, and the newer TMS9918A graphics chip – which contained extra graphic modes. By that time Texas Instruments was far from the only company in the home computer market in the US, let alone the rest of the world. Apple Computers, Tandy/Radio Shack, and Atari (with its consumer orientated computers with similar features to the TI-99) were ▶

# KEY PUBLISHERS

**The following publishers made the TI-99 range sing**

### ATARISOFT

Started by Atari Inc. in 1983 to port its popular titles to other competing platforms, Atarisoft ported several games to the TI-99/4A, including the likes of acclaimed Atari classics such as *Centipede*, *Defender*, *Dig Dug*, *Donkey Kong*, *Joust*, *Jungle Hunt*, *Pole Position*, *Robotron: 2084* and much more.

### SEGA

Seeing the success of its licensed titles *Zaxxon* and *Turbo* on the ColecoVision, in 1983 Sega decided to entered the third party market on its own. It ended up publishing several of its titles for the TI-99/4A in 1983, including *Buck Rogers: Planet Of Zoom*, *Congo Bongo*, *Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator*, and *Tac/Scan*.

### MILTON BRADLEY

Board game developer Milton Bradley had entered electronic games in the late Seventies with devices like *Simon* and the Microvision, and, by 1979, it was entering the third party videogame market as one of the first third party licensors for the 99/4. Games included computer versions of popular games like *Yahtzee*, *Connect Four* and *Hangman* as well as original titles in 1983 that supported its MBX expansion system.

### PARKER BROTHERS

Fellow board game developer, Parker Brothers, also famously entered the third party videogame market in 1983 with ports of arcade games it had licences to. For the 99/4A it released *Astrochase*, *Frogger*, *Popeye*, *Q*Bert* and *Tutankham*.

also fighting for the lower end home computer market share. And unknown to all of these contenders, a still vengeful Jack Tramiel was secretly preparing to enter the low end market as well.

With a lower priced and more attractive computer, TI's answer for expanding its market share was William J. Turner, a man who had spent the previous years marketing larger mainframe and minicomputers. William's plan was to get the 99/4A placed in the various department stores that already carried TI's calculators, and then spread out to other retail stores from then onwards. He was extremely successful, getting the 99/4A into stores such as J.C. Penny, Sears, Montgomery Ward, Toys "R" Us and even the likes of Kmart. At one point William was even close to signing up convenience store chain 7-Eleven, where, conceivably, one could buy a 99/4A along with a hot dog and Slurpee.

William also felt that the 99/4A's price had to be a lot lower than originally conceived, and he was not adverse to dropping the price as he saw fit. Within a few months, the price of the computer was dropped down to $375, thanks to William's work pushing the engineers to continually work on cost reducing the 99/4A while he grew the retail distribution to still keep that price point profitable. It worked out significantly well, and the 99/4A was being manufactured at a rate of 5,000 to 10,000 computers a week by early 1982. In fact, for 1982 at least, Texas Instruments was projecting a massive $1 billion in sales. Then came a price war with Jack Tramiel…



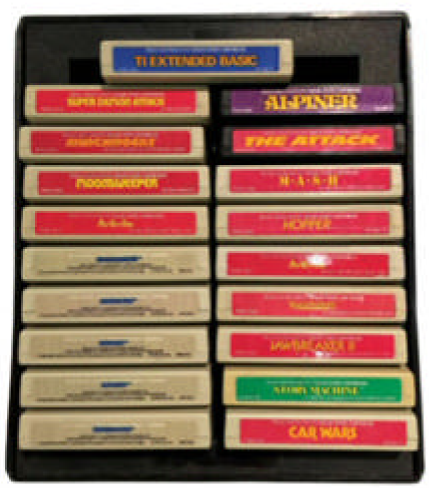
» Games were very distinctive and easily recognisable. We're actually quite big fans of Imagic's *Microsurgeon*.




## "William Turner hired Bill Cosby to be the TI's spokesperson"

Star power was used to sell systems

**When the Vic-20 was introduced at the January 1981 CES, TI hadn't even blinked. It was far more underpowered than its 99/4 and upcoming 99/4A model, with only 4K RAM, the same 8-bit** 6502 processor as most of the competitors, and lower resolution graphics. The problem was, it was perfectly suited for the low end introductory computer that TI had originally envisioned the 99/4 as, especially at a price of $299. The VIC-20 also had open architecture which, in turn, resulted in far more games and software being developed for the system than for the 99/4A (though, to be fair, TI did wind up opening it up somewhat with its expensive Peripheral Expansion Box).




Add to that the fact that Commodore had its own assembly lines in East Asia and wasn't locked into expensive chips, and you have a lean and mean competitor ready to strike back for the damage TI did to it years before in calculators. William wasn't one to shy away from market domination, though, and the impending great price war against Jack Tramiel was one that would devastate the low end computer market over the next few years. Everett Purdy, senior vice president of merchandising for computer retailer Service Merchandise at the time would state to the New York Times in 1983 that, "I have been in retailing 30 years and I have never seen any category of goods get on a self-destruct pattern like this."

It was William who fired the first shot. On 1 September 1982 he had Texas Instruments announce a rebate that dropped the 99/4A's price from about $300 to $199 to compete with the VIC-20's then $250 price. He had also hired Bill Cosby to be TI's spokesperson and to be the 99/4A's very likeable face of the




» The *Super Sketch* was another cartridge release, but one that came with a pad for drawing.

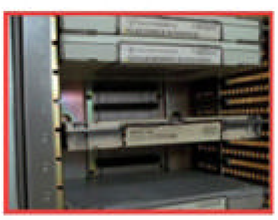
brand to the tune of a staggering $1 million. It worked for a time, with TI's computer sales skyrocketing and assembly lines sending out 150,000 a month to outsell the VIC-20 three to one. The problem was that in order to do drop the price, William had to dip into the profit margins since there was no further way to cost reduce the computer to give that much of a drop. So if say Jack Tramiel further dropped the price of the VIC-20, their only recourse would be to drop their price again and further cut into their margins. That's exactly what Jack decided to do.

**In January 1983 the VIC-20 hit $125 and shortly after TI was forced to follow suit again. The result? The 99/4A was just breaking even and the profit was gone. The matter was made worse by the fact that Jack and Commodore had sandwiched TI's computer between the VIC-20** and its rising star of a computer, the C64. Then on April 4 1983, as if smelling blood and moving in for the kill, Jack and Commodore cut the price of the VIC-20 to $99. There was no way William could have the 99/4A match that price, it cost more than $99 just to manufacture the 99/4A. Stalling and hoping the market would change, in June he finally committed industry suicide and matched the VIC-20's price hoping they could last long enough to get a newer, cheaper version out. Revising projections he also began shutting down assembly lines and laying off workers.

It became fruitless, however, as the price of the C64 was dropped as well. TI lost $400 million in two business quarters from the 99/4A and it was forced to post the first loss in the company's then almost fifty-year-long history. The home computer initiative was shut down during the fall.

Though it exited home computers, TI continued to develop business computers over the next two decades. The TI-99/4A, like many of the computers from that time period, went on to maintain a large and loyal worldwide cult following that still releases new peripherals and software to this day. The original TI-99/4 is now a highly collectible rarity. *

## MUST HAVE PERIPHERALS The TI-99 range had plenty of cool add-ons



### PERIPHERAL EXPANSION BOX

Meant to replace the large daisy chain of sidecar expansion boxes on the original TI-99/4, versions of this box were made for both the TI-99/4 and 4A models. Very heavy (both the case and underpinnings are solid metal), it contains eight card based expansion slots plus a 5 1/4 floppy disk bay.



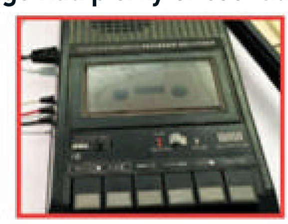
### SPEECH SYNTHESIZER

With TI's work in commercial grade speech synthesis chips, it was inevitable the 99/4 line would also get a speech synthesizer add-on. Enacting speech code in some of TI's games, it was also used in software like the *Terminal Emulator II*, enabling kids everywhere to pretend to be David Lightman from *Wargames*.



### MODEM

The TI-99's acoustic modem provided a rock solid 300 baud connection to dial up Bulletin Board Systems and networks like The Source, as well as sharing pirated software. Interestingly it was actually manufactured for TI by modem company, Novation, a major OEM manufacturer for TI's competitors like Atari and Tandy.



### PROGRAM RECORDER

Probably the most common way to load software in the early days, second to only the Solid State Software. TI didn't release its own branded recorder until 1983, late in the system's life. Though because it still supported third-party recorders, a large cassette-based software library developed regardless.



### TI JOYSTICKS

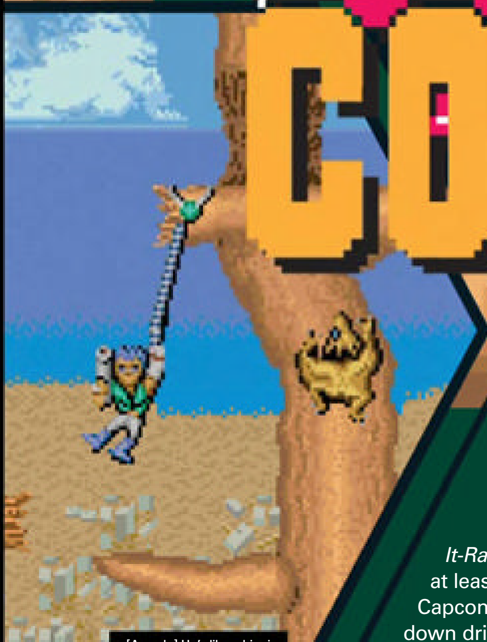
Rather than go the route of ripping off Atari's joysticks like Commodore and others did, TI created its own. The 99/4's sticks are eight direction ball grip sticks with a shoulder mounted fire button on the left hand side of the device. The 99/4As (shown here) use a more oblong shape with a tall stick and centred fire button.

# Bionic Commando

**Would you rather swing on a rope? Not really, we'd rather swing on a bionic arm in Capcom's groovy eighties arcade game. Mike Bevan checks out Steve Austin's distant Japanese cousin**



» [Arcade] Super-arm power-up ahoy!



» [Arcade] He's like a bionic Johnny Weissmüller…

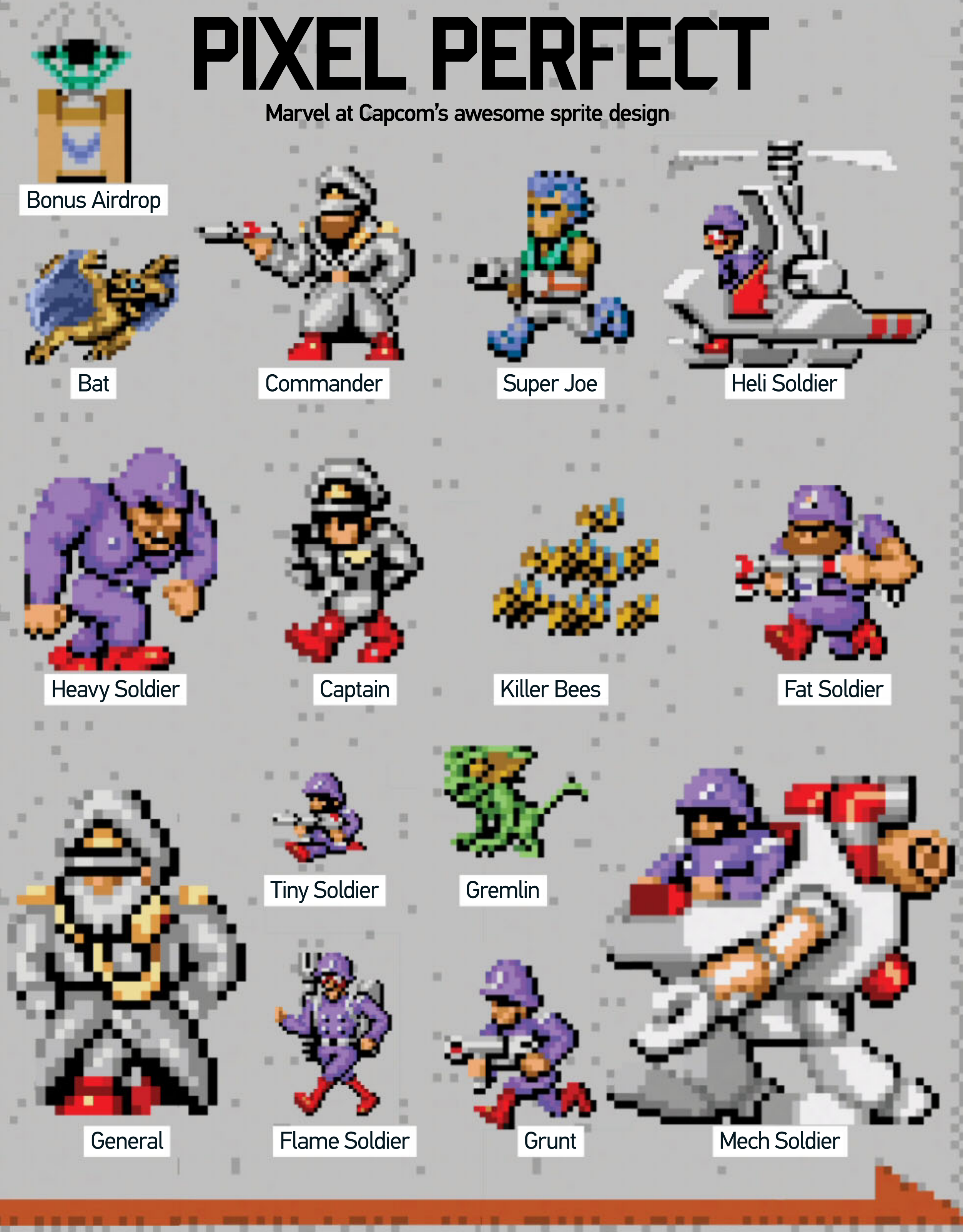
How many of you have heard of an arcade game mascot called Super Joe? He might have been absent from Disney's *Wreck-It-Ralph* but it turns out he was the star, at least in North America, of several early Capcom coin-ops. First appearing in a top-down driving game called *Speed Rumbler*, he progressed to sporting khaki trousers in the popular *Commando*, before being rebuilt, presumably for around $6 million, for *Bionic Commando*. The weird thing though is that all three games were very different, with *Bionic Commando* being one of the most radical arcade titles that Capcom produced in the Eighties. It's a platform game with no jumping where your only means of getting around is flinging an extendable limb to grab ledges and swing about like a miniature Tarzan with spiky blue hair. And this is a mechanic that makes the game surprisingly enjoyable, meaning a bit of strategy and forward thinking is required to safely traverse the game's five large scrolling levels.

It's odd that the game was touted as a semi-sequel to *Commando* as it's actually more James Bond than Arnie. Super Joe's mission involves infiltrating the underground headquarters of a shadowy dictatorship, destroying a large ballistic missile and taking care of a number of enemy commanders, culminating in a fight with a chap with a Santa beard. The game is played against a ticking timer that means your progress through the levels is meant to be brisk, but as it resets each time you die, it seems like a bit of an afterthought. ▶



# PIXEL PERFECT

**Marvel at Capcom's awesome sprite design**

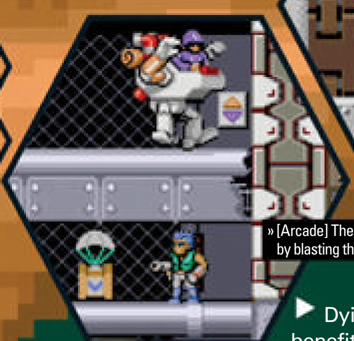





» [Arcade] We do like how when you die you come back on a nice floaty parachute.




» [Arcade] That looked painful…



» [Arcade] These doors must be opened by blasting the nearby switches.

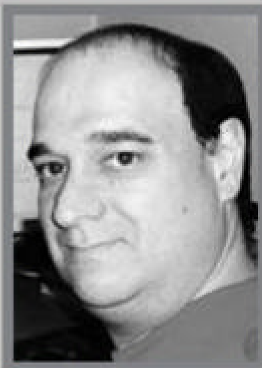
Dying also has the benefit of allowing you to parachute back down onto a higher platform from where you snuffed it, giving you an incentive to put a few more credits into the arcade game if you are that way inclined.

**Your mechanical arm can also be used to stun baddies at close range, and the way you can pull yourself up vertically to hang from an overhead ledge may** well have been an inspiration for Capcom's *Strider*. But swinging from platform to platform is the game's most entertaining aspect, being doubly useful in that enemies that you barge into mid swoop will be knocked out cold. The bad guys home in on your location relentlessly, but luckily you're equipped with a sidearm to take them out. Unfortunately your weapon only fires horizontally so its best to use the arm to get into position to dispatch them before they drop on top of you.

At the start of the game the lowly grunts that chase you only take a few

# STEVE RUDDY

## The 8-bit coder explains how he created his fantastic Commodore 64 port



**How did you end up working on the C64 version of *Bionic Commando*?**
Software Creations got a deal with US Gold as they were looking for teams to convert various Capcom titles they'd signed the rights for. They were actively looking for UK developers to do PAL specific versions.

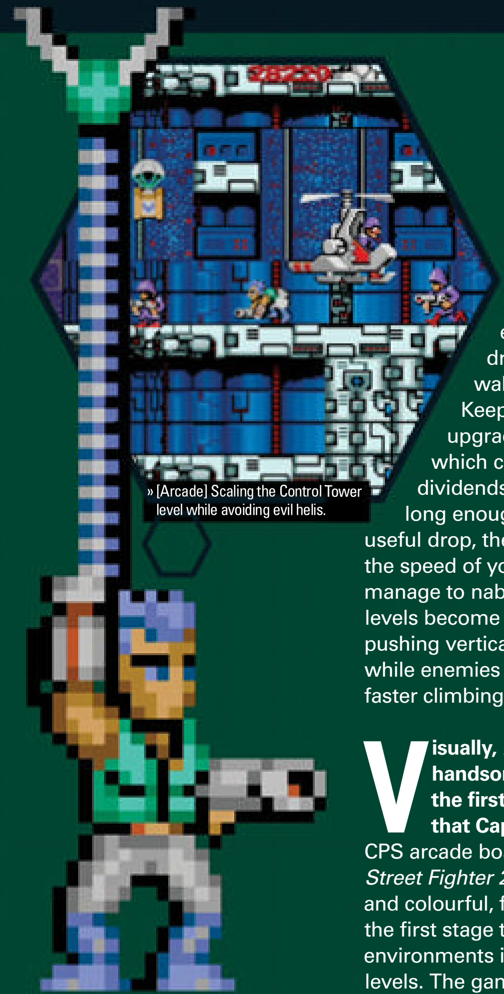
**Did you use the arcade game for reference?**
On *Bionic Commando* all we had was an arcade board. I don't think any of us had seen it at that point so we all had to play it to death to see how it worked, sketch out the map layouts and work out how the controls work. Eventually we got so good we'd have races to see who could finish the levels the quickest!

**The arcade version was pretty cutting-edge technology for the time. How difficult was it to do it justice on the C64?**
It was a massively impressive game for the time, so it was really all about trying to get the essence of the game on the C64. The basic look, the map layout, the baddies and most importantly the playability were the goals for the conversion.

Technically it was obvious it would need full screen scrolling, sprite multiplexing, animating backgrounds and multi-load to fit it all in. What wasn't quite as obvious was that the unique control mechanic, the bionic arm, wasn't suitable for sprite multiplexing due to the fact the player could throw it out sideways. So a very specific software sprite solution was needed for the arm.

**How did you go about recreating the arcade game's graphics?**
I wrote a map editor and as with most tools of that time it was hardly user friendly. The pixel background characters were created using a joystick and a few keys to select colour, these were then used to create character tiles which were then used to create the maps. Looking back I'm very surprised [artist] Andy Threlfall didn't beat me to death with a joystick and a breadbin C64!

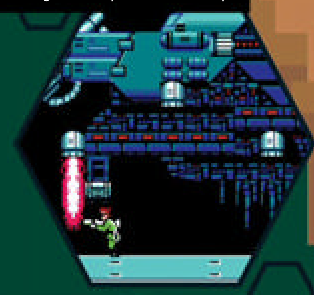
**Was it hard to get the mechanics of the bionic arm feeling right?**
Yes, it took a long time to get the combined control of movement, shooting and throwing out the bionic arm feeling natural with a joystick and a single fire button. In the end I was happy with it and you can only hope other people feel the same… Fortunately they seemed to.


» [Arcade] Scaling the Control Tower level while avoiding evil helis.

bullets to finish off, but later on more heavily armoured enemies, exploding assassins, bomb-dropping helicopters and robotic walkers make things a fair bit tougher. Keeping an eye out for weapon upgrade airdrops and bonus items, which can be grabbed with the arm, pays dividends if you can keep yourself alive long enough to put them to use. Another useful drop, the super-arm upgrade, will increase the speed of your bionic appendage should you manage to nab it. As the game progresses the levels become increasingly oriented towards pushing vertically up the screen with the arm while enemies start to swarm you, meaning a faster climbing rate is very useful.

**Visually, *Bionic Commando* was a handsome title for its day, being one of the first games to use the same chipset that Capcom would later employ in the** CPS arcade board (which powered *Strider* and *Street Fighter 2*). The backgrounds are stylish and colourful, from the pastoral woodland of the first stage to some distinctly *Star Wars*-like environments in the later underground base levels. The game's soundtrack is also particularly memorable, with some toe-tapping numbers accompanying the action on each level. This was an aspect that musician Tim Follin emulated superbly for the Commodore 64 and Spectrum conversions of the game by UK developer Software Creations. The C64 version was programmed by Steve Ruddy, who also coded the 64 port of *Bubble Bobble*. Tim also added an all-new, raucously percussive title-screen track that turned a few heads at the time. "Tim's knowledge of how to create sound as well as how to compose virtually guaranteed he'd create quality music on the C64 hardware," says Steve. "I don't think the funky title tune was intended to be used, but after I heard it I thought it amazing, and it sounded completely unlike anything else I'd heard on the C64 so it became the title tune!"

While Software Creations developed versions of *Bionic Commando* in Europe for 8-bit and 16-bit home computers, Capcom USA published an alternative C64 conversion, along with a PC DOS port, for the American market. However these are generally best avoided, being sub-par to the European releases. ▶


» [NES] The NES and Game Boy versions are completely different games compared to the coin-op.


» [Arcade] We really, really hate these mechs.

# CONVERSION CAPERS

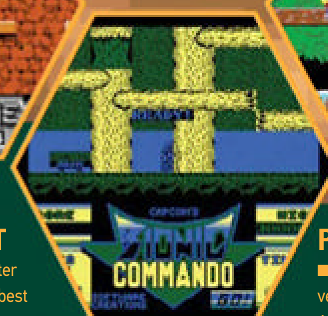
## The best and worst home ports of Capcom's game

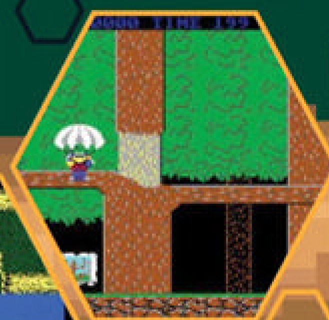












### C64 (EUROPE)

■ Despite slightly low-res visuals, Ste Ruddy's C64 conversion is undoubtedly the most impressive of the 8-bit ports, with elegantly smooth scrolling and all the levels and enemies of the original game. The all-important bionic arm is well implemented and a joy to use, and Tim Follin's masterful soundtrack is arguably even better than the arcade version.

### C64 (US)

■ The American C64 version is by comparison a real step backwards, the main criticism being that you can't use the bionic arm to swing as you can in the European version, you can only use it to grapple yourself up platforms– a major gameplay oversight. Scrolling also only occurs when you reach the edge of the screen making it hard to see what's coming up in front of you.

### SPECTRUM

■ Unlike most Spectrum arcade ports of the time, Software Creations made an effort to add a bit of colour to their conversion and it's faster and more responsive than on the C64 even if the arm isn't nearly as nicely done. It uses push-scrolling again, but Tim Follin's soundtrack is second only to the Euro C64 port, and amazing for a Speccy…

### AMIGA/ATARI ST

■ The 16-bit home computer ports should really be the best of the bunch but they are let down by using push-scrolling which is slightly odd given the much more powerful hardware compared to the C64. Both versions are practically identical, and if anything the game runs too fast for our liking. The music isn't as impressive as on the C64 or Speccy either.

### AMSTRAD CPC

■ The Amstrad conversion is based on code taken from the Spectrum release, but unfortunately it runs a lot slower and the garish choice of colours used on the backdrops is a little worrying to say the least. There's also no in-game music at all which relegates this version to the bottom of the pile of the Software Creations ports.

### PC DOS

■ This US-developed PC version is similar to the American C64 port, but somehow manages to be even worse. The graphics are similarly angular and blocky but the main drawback is that there's no scrolling whatsoever – the screen just flicks to another one when Super Joe gets to the edge making for a frustrating and disjointed experience.

# SWING-ME-DO A visual walkthrough of Bionic Commando



## STAGE 1: THE FOREST



**1.1** Joe begins his mission in a forest clearing. His goal is to reach the enemy base entrance in the top right corner of the level. Despite the secretive nature of the area if you look closely you'll find a map on the sign at the start...



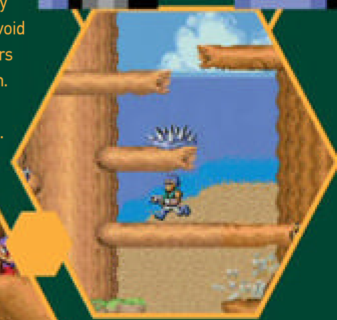
**1.2** If you are quick you will be able to get a fast-grapple airdrop after shooting the first electrified barrier. This helps you move around the stage quite a bit faster.



**1.3** Be mindful of the lethal spiky mines littered around the tree branches. Using a diagonal arm-swing is good for getting over them. At this point you should also be able to pick up the more powerful green gun airdrop.




**1.4** The smaller enemy soldiers will try and jump down on top of you so avoid or shoot them. The larger sleeping soldiers can be bypassed if you don't disturb them. Try not to shoot the bee hives either or you'll get chased by an angry swarm.



**1.5** As you get higher up you'll encounter branches that break off and fall, as well as these bat-like critters. Try and climb upwards as quickly as possible, and use the arm swing to stun them if you can.

▶ The Japanese Famicom version is decidedly odd, and we kid you not, involves some sort of dastardly spy-themed plot to resurrect Hitler. Obviously Nintendo balked at talk of bringing back dead Nazi despots in the Western version and made a few slightly more family friendly changes for the NES release. However, *Bionic Commando* on the NES is a completely different game, taking some of the side-scrolling action of the arcade instalment and adding a strategic map and top-down scrolling sections along with a different storyline and new hero, Ladd Spencer. This is the version that the 2008 release *Bionic Commando Rearmed* was based on, rather than the arcade game. More recently Capcom experienced an unfortunate misfire in trying to create a 3D *Bionic Commando* reboot, which failed to return on investment. But the original arcade game is probably best remembered for introducing our first taste of a game mechanic that freed us from the jump button. And while ledge grappling is commonplace in everything from *Spiderman* and *Batman* videogame tie-ins to *Far Cry 4* and *Tomb Raider*, as far as we're aware *Bionic Commando* did it first. ★

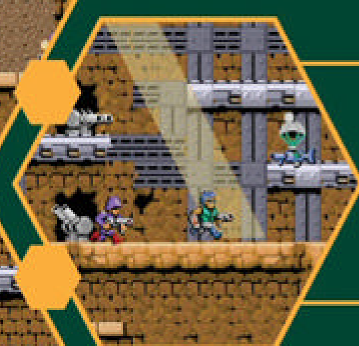
## STAGE 2: THE FOREFRONT



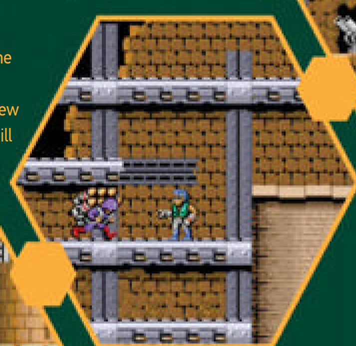
**2.1** As you approach the base you'll come across this flimsy-looking control tower whose occupants will try to shoot you. Sort them out then carry on across the bridge into the main fortress area.



**2.2** As you grapple upwards you need to time your ascent to avoid the cannon fire. Hanging below ledges with your grapple will help with the timing. Towards the top be wary of the electrified rails and constant stream of soldiers.



**2.3** You'll soon run into an area populated by sentry guns and wavering searchlights. Try to approach behind them in order to destroy them in relative safety.



**2.4** Another danger on this level are the suicidal soldiers who are packed with explosives, which charge at you and try to detonate their payload.

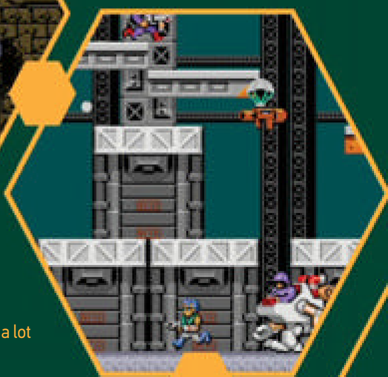


**2.5** As you near the exit of the fortress you'll need to run the gauntlet past these hulks that throw crates down at you. They take a fair few shots to dispatch and you'll need to kill at least one to make it through.

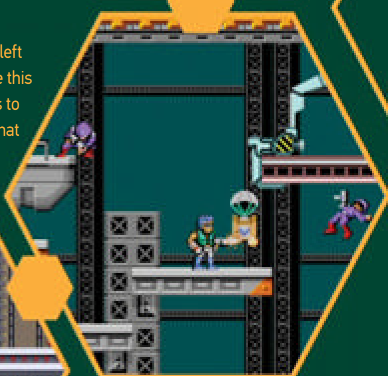
## STAGE 3: THE INFILTRATION



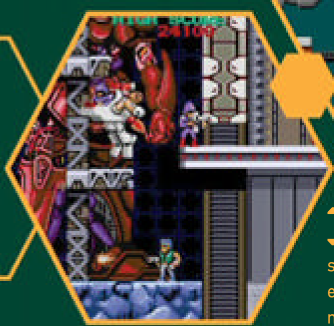
**3.1** At the start of this stage you'll jump down a long vertical shaft into what looks like a network of sewers. Here you are introduced to these little green gremlins that annoyingly destroy the platforms around you. Don't get hit by falling debris.



**3.2** Once you're out of the sewers you'll encounter these mech-piloting soldiers. These are the toughest enemy yet as their bullets can't be ducked and they take a lot of punishment before going down.

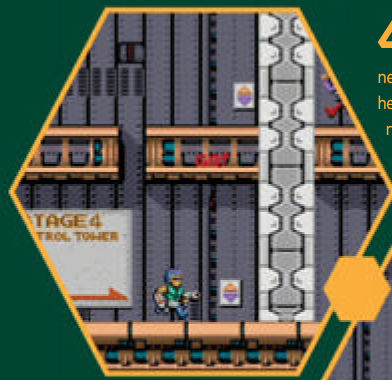


**3.3** If you approached from the left side of the base you can use this handy moving platform to get across to the other side of the complex. Note that you'll need to grapple the roof above to get on board.



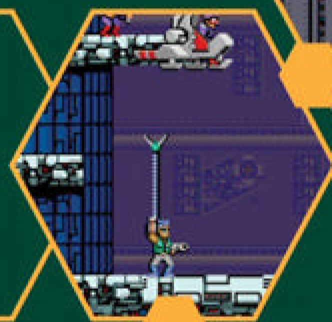
**3.4** You'll have to get past a number of towering robotic monstrosities and blast through several doors to reach your first targets, a pair of enemy Captains. To get past the robots time your movement to run safely under their stomping feet.

## STAGE 4: THE CONTROL TOWER

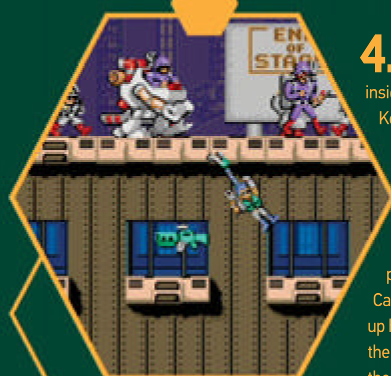


**4.1** The Control Tower is guarded by a series of blast doors and a new enemy, flamethrower-equipped heavy soldiers. Keep an eye out for the red weapon drop that fires explosive bullets, it will make short work of them if you can grab it.





**4.2** At the far right of the security corridor is an access lift that will take you further into the complex. Watch out for the approaching helicopter soldier as he will attempt to bomb you. If he dives to attack prepare to return fire.



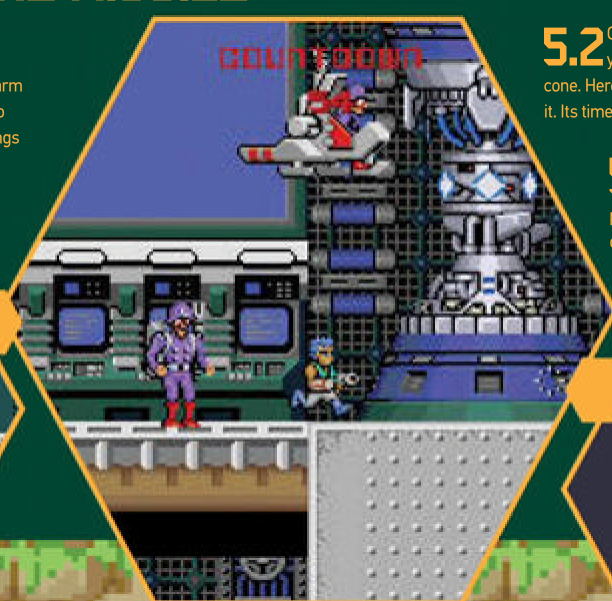
**4.3** Exiting the lift you'll enter an area that rather reminiscent of the inside of the Death Star from *Star Wars*. Keep an eye out for helicopters and use the arm to ascend and swing across the chasm-like gaps between platforms.

**4.4** At the top of this section is a flat platform with a lot of patrolling bad guys, including two enemy Captains and a Commander. It's hard to get up here without getting killed so hang below the ledge and time your entrance. Collecting the green weapon drop will also help.

## STAGE 5: STOP THE MISSILE

**5.1** The final stage is one of the shortest in the game, taking the form of a mad dash to disarm a launching nuclear missile. You have 60 seconds to reach the top of the errant ICBM while the game flings some of its trickiest enemies at you.






**5.2** On reaching the top of the enormous rocket you can access a control room to the right of its cone. Here you will find the fusion generator that powers it. Its time to blow it to kingdom come.

**5.3** But it's not over yet, soldier. Carry on upwards to the right and you'll come face to face with the game's only proper boss, a beardy General, guarded by two Captains. He doesn't put up much of a fight, though to be fair, though, he's getting on a bit. Mission completed: World saved!



# BLADE RUNNER

**Ridley Scott's 1982 classic is one of the most highly praised science fiction films of all time. Join us as Craig Ritchie talks to Louis Castle about crafting a game worthy of its name**

**When remembering how Westwood ended up with the *Blade Runner* licence, Louis Castle recalls, "it happened to be my favourite film, but we did not seek it out." Louis held the positions of** executive producer, art director and technical director on Westwood's sci-fi classic. "The Blade Runner Partnership was shopping the IP to many publishers. We were fortunate enough to have Virgin let us know about the potential to pitch a game concept so I jumped at the opportunity and worked feverishly over a few weeks with Aaron Powell and Rick Parks of Westwood's art department to build a pitch."

Louis later found out that the most potential licensees had pitched FPS games about retiring replicants. Westwood's approach, on the other hand, was to capture the emotional effect of the film. "I felt strongly," says Louis, "that the run-and-gun in low polygon worlds would not have captured the richness of the setting or the feeling of terror and suspense so brilliantly created by Ridley Scott for *Blade Runner* and *Alien*."

Westwood also did not wish to merely mirror the plot of the movie into a video game. Instead, its *Blade Runner* would tell a story running concurrently with events in the film, introducing a new protagonist in the way of Ray McCoy. He's clearly inspired by Harrison Ford's Rick Deckard, but being a novel character allowed Westwood to tell its own story and explore the themes of the film without interfering in any way with its plot. "We planned to recreate as many of the key moments in the film we could, but did not intend to use any of the film directly," explains Louis.

One particularly memorable example present in the game is the Voight-Kampff Test. This machine is introduced in the opening scene of the film when replicant Leon Kowalski is being asked a series of questions designed to elicit and measure emotional responses. It is used to determine if the interviewee is human or replicant, and the game has McCoy conduct a number of these tests throughout. It is brilliantly recreated, and brought into the game true to Ridley Scott's original, without stepping on the film's toes in any way. Similarly, the police station is faithfully rendered, and from the same camera angle from which we see it introduced in the movie, as are scenes in Chinatown, Deckard's same apartment block, and many more.

The end result is one of the most faithful adaptations to the source material




## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
- » **DEVELOPER:** WESTWOOD STUDIOS
- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **PLATFORM:** PC
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

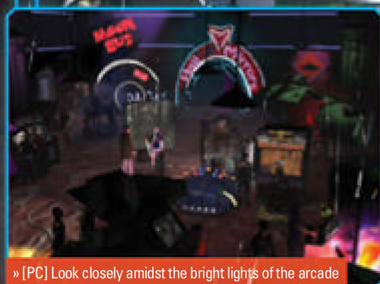
ever. What is more, the similarities extend beyond the visual experience as the game explores many of the same themes as the film – the uncertainty which haunts Rachael and Deckard is mirrored by the ambiguity present in the game. "Deckard is a replicant in the film, but not in the book," says Louis. "McCoy is undefined and playable as either. It really is up to the player to decide. The game can be extremely non-linear. When you start, several of the characters are randomly determined to be replicants or human sympathisers. This makes it tough to go back and play the game a second time the same way. Save the game before confronting Zuben at the butcher shop. Go ahead and shoot him the first time through then reload the game and instead of shooting Zuben in the alley, try putting your gun away. The differences illustrate what to look for in the game. The obvious choices are not the only choices."

**The soundtrack is one of the most striking and memorable elements of the film, and the game is no different. For legal reasons the team could** not use Vangelis' original score so instead would have to recreate the soundtrack for the game. But instead of having to outsource to a specialist, they had Westwood's in-house audio star Frank Klepacki to produce all they required. "Frank was a full time employee of Westwood," says Louis, "and did most of the composition for our games as well as many of the sound effects. He is also incredibly talented, and he's my cousin, so chances are I would have chosen to work with him anyway!"

The rights to use the film assets were also somewhat complicated and it was not clear to Westwood exactly which of the actors' images and performances they could include. What they could



» [PC] The KIA serves as McCoy's personal clue database, allowing the player to sift through everything he has uncovered.

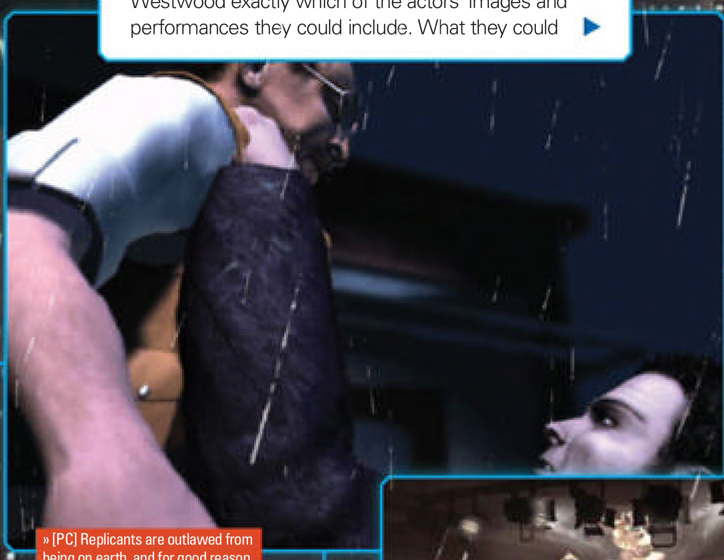


» [PC] Look closely amidst the bright lights of the arcade to uncover a *Command & Conquer* Easter Egg.

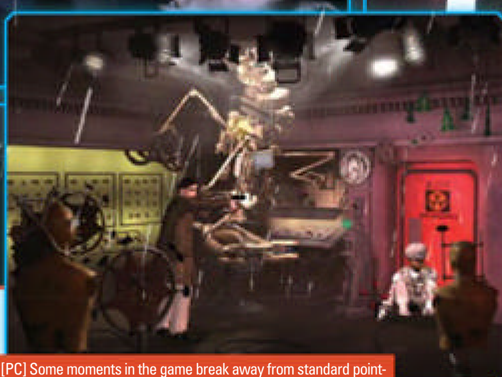


» [PC] Chinatown, where we first meet Deckard in the movie, serves as a prominent setting in the game.

> "WE PLANNED TO RECREATE MANY OF THE KEY MOMENTS IN THE FILM"
>
> Louis Castle



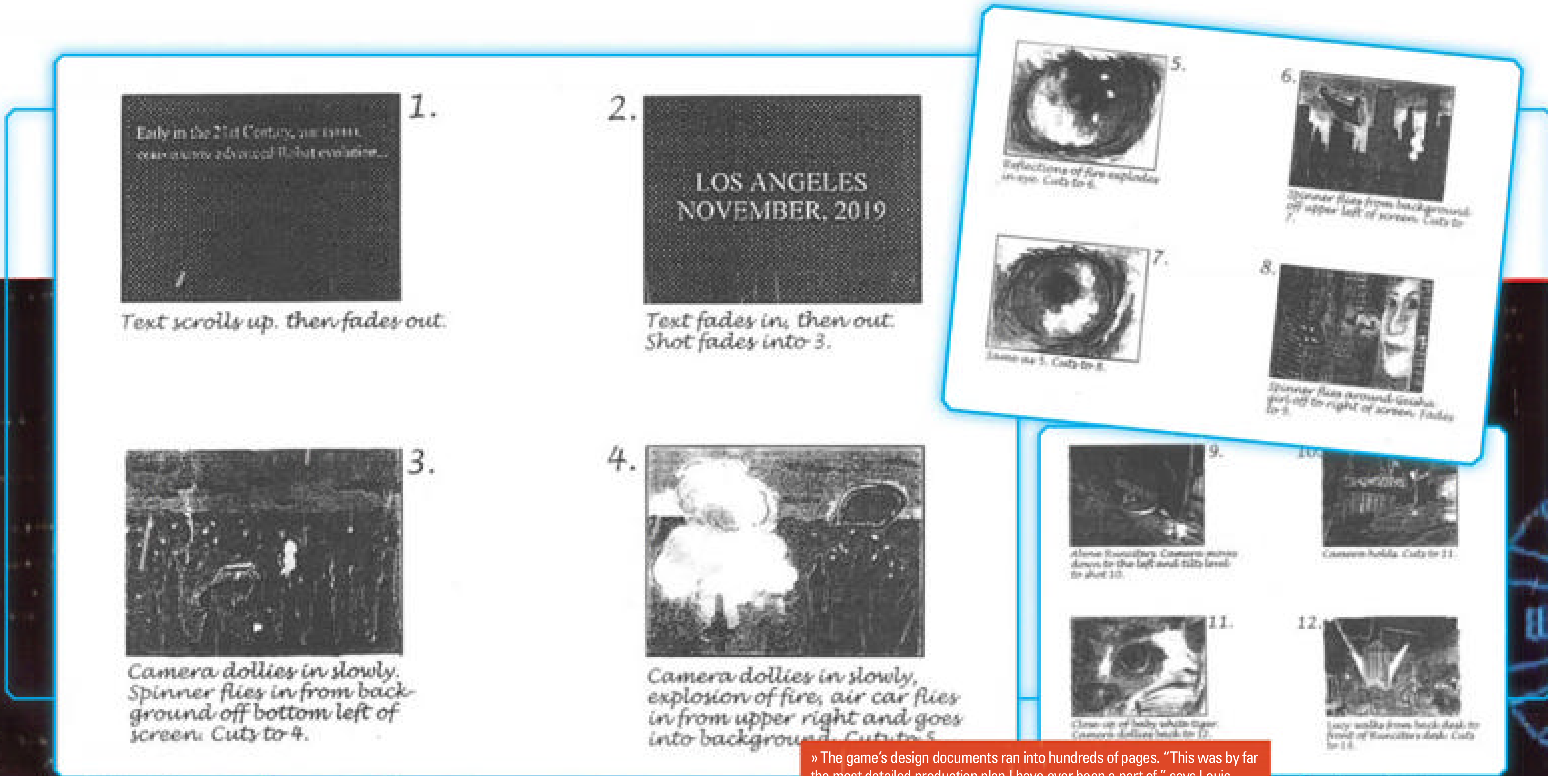
» [PC] Replicants are outlawed from being on earth, and for good reason.



» [PC] Some moments in the game break away from standard point-and-click fare, requiring quick thinking and just as quick acting.



» This original concept art shows off the painstaking detail put in to recreating locations from the film.




» The game's design documents ran into hundreds of pages. "This was by far the most detailed production plan I have ever been a part of," says Louis.

do, though, was to hire as many of them as they could for motion capture, 3D modeling and voiceover recording. "In fact," says Louis, "almost all of the actors were excited to revisit their roles. We also had to add a large new cast for our story. We employed two or three actors for every digital character. We broke each character into performance capture, models and voiceover which were cast as one to three separate live actors. Joe Kucan (yes, Kane from *C&C*) and Donny Miele did an amazing job of casting for the roles and Joe did a phenomenal job of directing the performances to match Ridley Scott's work."

Westwood's decision to recreate the score and record their own sound effects and actor dialogue was born out of more than just the legal concerns. "We knew from the concept phase that to make this game we were going to require a great deal more content than the film," recalls Louis. "The soundtrack included sound effects and editing that matched the linear narrative. Video elements were mixed and composed for the film. We needed separate score and effects, different camera angles and new audio and video assets. It followed that Westwood would need to match the assets of the film rather than mixing some film assets with game assets. Film assets would just simply look and sound too different."

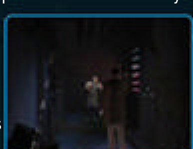
What may escape modern gamers is just how cutting edge *Blade Runner*'s graphics were for the late Nineties, and this is again a result of Louis' ambitious vision for the project. "I wanted to produce a real detective game," he says, "not the red key, red door adventure tree so typical in games then, and now. More importantly, I wanted the visual presentation to be as close as possible to the Ridley Scott's film. This was a tall order in 1996, but I was confident the Westwood art team could deliver. We just needed to find a technical solution to rendering."

**Sure enough, it was such a tall order that there didn't even exist technology which could handle what Westwood were trying to do – and** so it developed its own. "The character models themselves often exceeded 750k polygons," explains Louis, "but the best 3D cards available at the time could only render a few hundred polygons per frame, and that was without the complex shaders we use now. So, there was no way we could render a single character, let alone the kind of rich world from the *Blade Runner* film, using typical 3D approaches. We pre-rendered each model as thin slices and combined them to make a voxel representation. We called the technique slice models, but they were effectively a voxel skin built from whatever could be rendered in Max. We used our Westwood compression technologies invented in the late Eighties and improved for video in products like *Command & Conquer* and *Monopoly* in the Nineties but otherwise the story

## DEFINING MOMENTS

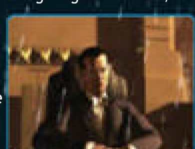
### RETIRE OR SYMPATHISE?

■ Zuben presents the first instance where the player must make a decision whether to retire a replicant or to sympathise with him. It's easy to simply gun him down, but putting the weapon away can lead one down alternative branches in the story.



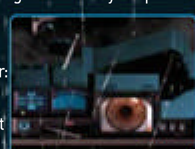
### ELDON TYRELL

■ Meeting Tyrell shows off Westwood's achievements in bringing the film's characters to the PC. The location's lighting and colours, his mannerisms and voicework by actor Joe Turkel brings one instantly into the heart of the Tyrell Corporation.



### VOIGHT-KAMPFF

■ The iconic Voight-Kampff Test used to detect replicants is excellently recreated in the game, with a wide range of brilliantly scripted questions and responses for test subjects. Remember: be careful what you ask a replicant about his mother…



### EXPANDING THE UNIVERSE

■ Westwood added to the depth of the *Blade Runner* universe by including video sequences of the off-world colonies mentioned in both the film and the game, giving a first glimpse of where the replicants are actually being put to work.



simulator, deferred rendering, voxels and real time image compositing was all built for *Blade Runner*."

Using these techniques meant the artists were free to use any of the rendering methods available to them without worrying about polygon counts. The voxel data was then compressed using Westwood's own very efficient compression technology, and subsequently stored frame by frame. "The motion capture sequences," says Louis, "over 6,000 of them, would create massive amounts of data even after being compressed. This is why the game shipped on four CD-ROMs, which was unprecedented at that time."

**The process required an artist to go into the motion capture models and find the key frames to get each** sequence down to a number that was manageable for late-Nineties PCs. "The quality of the individual models was inversely related to the number of frames in their animation," recalls Louis. "That's why so many of the characters look blocky and pixelated. Those were sequences we just did not have the time to improve by hand. The voxels allowed us to infer normal vectors and depth vales for every pixel rasterised into the screen. That's how we were able to combine the composited elements and make sure that each of them were properly dynamically lit by the scene."

Incidentally, the proprietary rendering software that they built for *Blade Runner* was never used for another game after. Westwood did employ the voxel system to create the units for *Tiberian Sun*, and the compression technology was used many times since, but not in the core game engine for any subsequent title, which is another reason this game's characters and their interaction with the scenes was so unique.

These scenes, comprised of beautifully rendered environments that recreate locations in the game immediately take the player into Ridley Scott's cyberpunk interpretation of Philip K. Dick's novel. Dark and often rainy, they are lit by lavish neon signs or giant screens shining product logos and corporate slogans, and, of course, the flashes of futuristic craft speeding overhead. With such rich source material to live up to when building new locations their game, it made sense to bring in industrial designer and futurist Syd Mead for a few months in pre-production. Syd's idea was that since he had worked on the film, he would be the perfect fit to imagine the new spaces needed for the game. "Ultimately the work produced matched the concept work for the film," says Louis, "however, the literal creation of the sets just didn't feel right. So, we also hired the property production manager for the film. It turns out that most of the film set were dressed with props on hand to try and match Syd's vision. Once we did the same thing in 3D it all came together. Syd was a joy to work with and an amazingly talented illustrator."

If you are inspired to pick up this point-and-click classic for a play, through, do yourself the favour of watching *Blade Runner* before you do. Even if you've watched it numerous times before (and shame on you if you haven't) a refresher is an essential accompaniment to the game. "I love the emotional feelings that the film provokes," explains Louis. "Philip K. Dick wrote a fantastic story exploring where, or if, the edge of human and machine exists, and Ridley Scott took that context to create a rich detective film noir set in a world where the protagonist searches for his identity. It is rare that a story can be so deep and viscerally entertaining. When you add great futurist vision, wonderful cinematic direction and audio score, you have a film that I never tire of watching."

To finish off, we ask Louis if he thinks there is room in the industry for a remake, or a new game in the *Blade Runner* universe. "I do," he says, "I would love to work on a remake or a new game in the universe. I hear of groups looking to acquire the IP, so you never know." *

**All artwork and design documentation copywright of Westwood, used courtesy of Louis Castle and taken from his collection.**

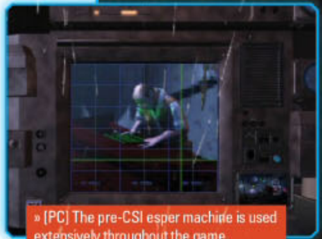


## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**EYE OF THE BEHOLDER** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1990

**DUNE 2**
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1992

**COMMAND & CONQUER**
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
**YEAR:** 1995



» [PC] The pre-CSI esper machine is used extensively throughout the game.





» [PC] Who could ever forget those billowing flames on approach to the Tyrell Corporation's headquarters?





» [PC] McCoy's chief means of transport around LA: the iconic flying vehicle known as a 'Spinner'.

### SEBASTIAN'S WORKSHOP

■ Another defining moment in the game comes when the player first enters J.F. Sebastian's home. We get to see all his projects, various high-tech gadgetry, and, of course, his little friends – most notably the General, which is shown right here.



### GOING UNDERGROUND

■ At a certain point in the game, McCoy can no longer use his Spinner. As a result of this, the underground network of sewers and railway tunnels becomes a means of navigating Los Angeles, and adds a different dimension to the game.



### THAT DAMN RAT BRIDGE

■ This stands out to us as the most brutal and frustrating puzzle in McCoy's entire adventure. Maybe we're just a little slower here at Retro Towers, but nothing else required the same amount of reloads before figuring out how to overcome it.



### CONSPIRACY THEORY

■ Using the Esper is intergral to *Blade Runner*'s story, and at one point the player will discover an alarming image. Has McCoy been inserted into the photograph as part of a conspiracy, or could this mean that he is unknowingly a replicant too?






# LORICIELS

**'Oric' may have been its middle name (of sorts) but originality was certainly Loriciels hallmark. David Crookes looks back over the company's successful and innovative Eighties period as well as its very troubled early Nineties**

**In 1983, change was very much in the French air and it had little to do with the fact the Parisian streets were choking on the emissions of Peugeot's popular new 205. Toumi Djaidja had led France's equivalent of America's civil rights protests, awakening the country to discrimination and racism. FC Nantes was about to win it's last Ligue 1 for more than a decade. And the country was** beginning to see the opportunities being afforded by the fledgling computer industry.

Leading the way was the 8-bit Oric-1, a relatively expensive machine costing around 2,500 francs, the equivalent of a month's work for many, "certainly for me," says coder Alain Fernandes about the machine, but "cheaper than the Commodore 64 which cost around 7,000 francs". By the end of 1983, the Oric-1 had sold some 50,000 units, making it France's top-selling computer. It was the perfect machine for the impatient – "The ZX Spectrum cost the same, but it had a wait of between eight and 12 weeks for the French market," Alain explains – and this was very good news for Laurant Weill.

Laurant was the owner of a Parisian computer shop called Ellix, which happened to be the country's biggest importer of the Oric. A huge number of francs were ringing through his tills and, on the days when Laurant would take deliveries of Oric-1s, queues would stretch a quarter of a mile outside the store. His customers had the same wide-eyed desire and curiosity he had shown at the age of 13 when his father introduced him to a room full of large, impressive machines and took him to the Salon International De L'Informatique Du Bureau computing conference (or Sicob as it was also known).

As well as studying computing at university and becoming an experienced programmer, Laurant had even built his own computer at his kitchen table with like-minded friends. They called it the TOM and it was based on the 16-bit Motorola 68000 processor which had been first manufactured in 1979. It failed to gain traction, however, with hardware companies telling them that they wanted to concentrate on 8-bit machines instead. But it gave Laurant much needed experience in dealing with computer firms.

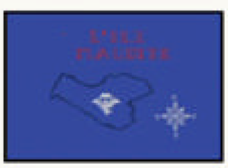



» [ZX Spectrum] *Eddie Edwards Super Skis* developed by Microïds.

By the time he and his engineer friend, Marc Bayle, had decided to go into business in 1983 and set up a new publishing company, 23-year-old Laurant was in the right place at the right time. The pair decided that the Oric-1 would become their primary focus and so they swiftly got to work in their new office on Rue Lamandé in the 17th Parisian arrondissement (administrative district), studying the market and the kind of games and software people most liked to play and use.

Laurant then asked his partner, Isabelle, to register their new firm at the intellectual property office, the Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle. Isabelle went along and looked at the available list. She noted that all of the names Laurant and Marc had considered had been taken and decided to register the company under the name, Loriciels instead, basing it upon 'logiciel', the French translation for software. It was a rather inspired choice since, in replacing the 'g' with an 'i' (and adding an 's') the company name was able to include the word 'Oric'. This proved to be a fantastic homage to the home computer that had driven them to set up the firm in the first place.

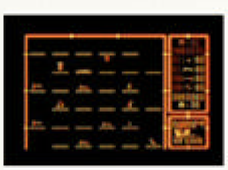
At first, Loriciels employed freelance programmers including Laurent Benes who produced the French text



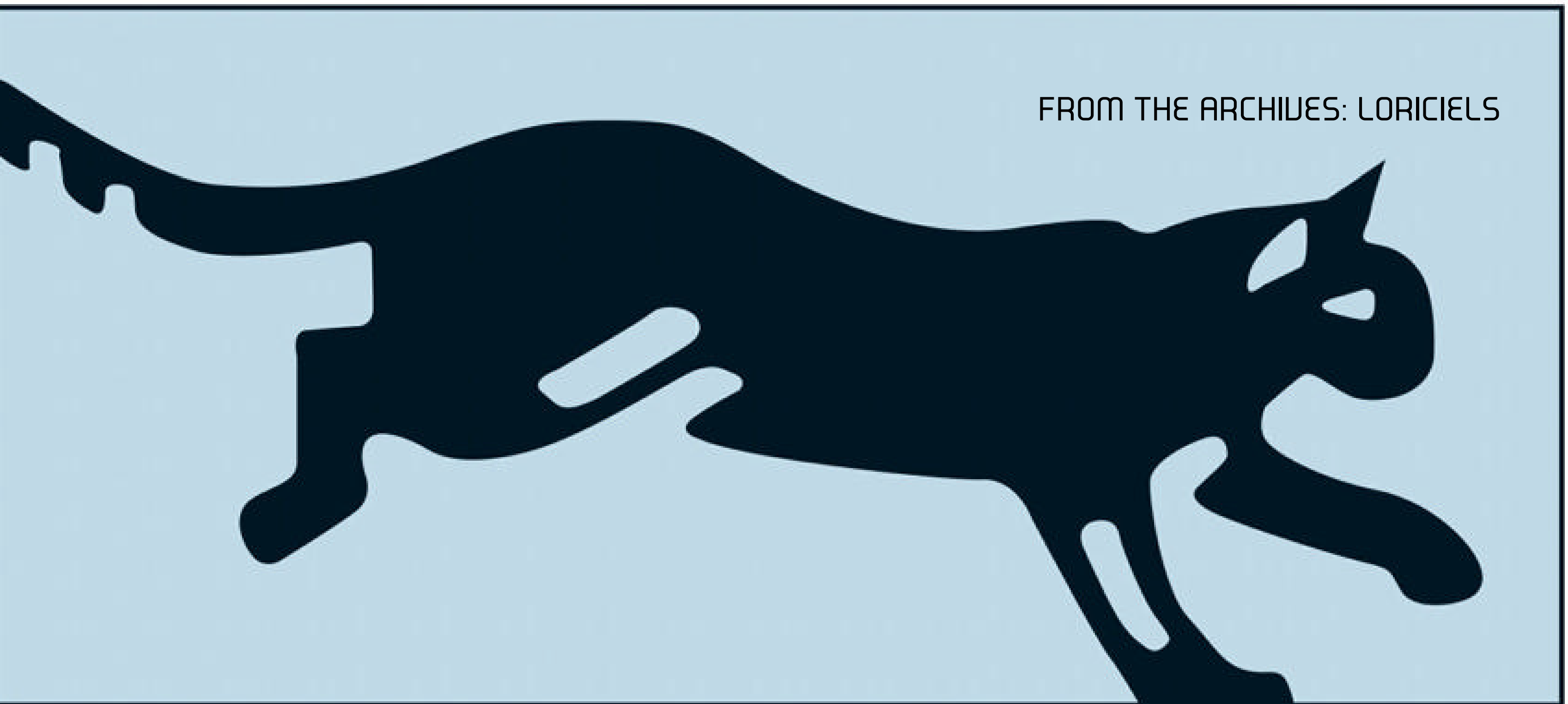
» [ZX Spectrum] *Cursed Diamond Island*, was an early Lorciels' game.




» [Amstrad] Can you guess what this game was inspired by?



» [Amstrad] *Bumpy* was a very testing and unusual little game.



adventure *Le Mystère De Kikekankoi*, Carlo Perconti who made *Jeep*, Pierre Faure who developed *Citadelle* and Éric Chahi who created *Doggy*. It released a raft of Oric-1 titles from *Crocky* to *Le Manoir Dr Genius*, but it also very quickly shifted the focus to other platforms, too. Carlo programmed a variant on the 1982 arcade game *Q*bert* which was called *Hubert* for the Commodore 64 and Thierry Gangloff produced *Bounzy* for the same machine. Vincent Baillet made *Jeu De Dames* for the Thomson MO and Bertrand D'Armagnac and Frédéric Baille wrote *Le Diamant De l'Île Maudite* for the Amstrad CPC.

Of those, Vincent in particular would go on to enjoy a long-lasting association with Loriciels, rising up through the ranks and having in a hand in many of its key titles. Vincent had been coding since he was 14-years-old, starting with a fully programmable Texas T157 calculator which afforded him 49 bytes to work with – just enough to produce some very basic games. "A bit later, a friend of mine bought a Tandy TRS80 computer," he says. "It was a fantastic machine with 16kb of RAM and a tape recorder. We started programming it in order to solve puzzles that we found in the various magazines."

Vincent's passion for the board game *Othello* encouraged him to continue programming. He produced versions of it on a HP41C calculator and a ZX81 before snapping up an Oric-1, programming ▶




» [Amstrad] *Turbo Cup* included a limited edition offer of a Porsche 944 Matchbox car with driver René Metge's name on the side.

## IN THE KNOW

- Loriciels is a contraction of the words 'logiciel' (French for 'software') and 'Oric'.
- It was one of France's early videogame companies together with Infogrames and Titus.
- Co-founder Laurant Weill used to run a successful computer shop that imported Oric-1s.
- Loriciels produced languages, utilities and educational software alongside its videogames, too.
- A distribution division called Loridif was set up shortly after Loriciels formed.
- The Eighties was Loriciels most successful period.
- Although Loriciels worked closely with Amstrad France, Laurant met UK boss Alan Sugar twice.
- Loriciels went onto become one of France's largest gaming developers before going bankrupt.
- Its programmers were technically ambitious and they would seek to amaze gamers (and each other) with clever techniques.
- When the company changed its name from Loriciels to Loriciel, the logo was also altered.
- Financial issues struck mainly due to the company's struggle breaking into the console market.
- Xavier Neil, 'The French Steve Jobs' and founder of France's second-largest ISP Free started his first business in Loriciels' 'cellar'.
- Virtual Studio, born out of Loriciels, mainly made games for the doomed Atari Jaguar.
- About 150 games were published by Loriciels in total.

## TIMELINE

- **1983** Loriciels is founded by Laurent Weill and Marc Bayle.
- **1983** Philippe Seban joins to head up the publicity division, buys a 50% stake and becomes managing director.
- **1985** The acclaimed *L'Aigle D'Or* is released and becomes Adventure Game of the Year.
- Although the initial focus has been on the Oric-1, the CPC 6128 becomes a big seller in France.
- As well as making games, Loriciels decides to move into publising edutainment software.
- **1986** A successful year for the firm as *Bactron*, *Sapiens*, *MGT: The Magnetik Tank* are released.
- **1988** Loriciels Limited was created in a move to bring its games to the UK under a deal with Elite Systems.
- **1989** West Phaser lightgun is released in time for Christmas. It was modelled on a classic six-shooter.
- The rather cuddly game, *Skweek*, is given a Gold award in *Tilt* magazine for the Best Action game.
- **1990** Early signs of trouble are hinted at. Loriciels decides to drop its 's' and becomes Loriciel SA.
- **1991** *Super Skweek*, for the Super Nintendo, continues the success of its acclaimed predecessor.
- **1992** *Val d'Isère Championship* (or *Tommy Moe's Winter Extreme: Skiing and Snowboarding* is released.
- Major financial problems (such as difficulty breaking into the console market) lead Loriciel to bankruptcy.
- **1993** The remnants of Loriciel SA resurface as Virtual Studio. The studio didn't last for long.
- **1994** Virtual Studio closes its doors and Laurant Weill moves on to create Visiware.

▶ *Reversi Champion* and getting in touch with Laurant who was looking for software to distribute. "I had only seen programming as something that was fun," he says. "I didn't think it could become my future work but I came back from meeting Laurant with my first developer contract."

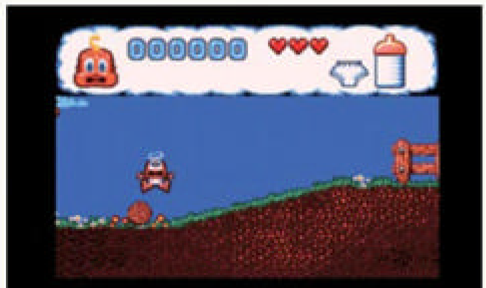
It was a well-timed move. Within 15 months of starting up, Loriciels had become the top publisher in France having sold 200,000 cassettes and discs in 1984 and amassed a revenue of some 12 million francs. Not only had it set up its own marketing and publicity department, the company had achieved great success with a breakthrough title called *L'Aigle D'Or* for the Oric-1. It was an action-adventure game in which players were tasked with finding a precious Golden Eagle. The title won the Gold accolade in France's respected computer magazine, *Tilt*, and it was named the best adventure game of the year.

Loriciels had also been branching out. The company wanted to have its fingers in every pie, and control development, distribution and publishing in any market it could. Loridif was created to distribute the company's products within France and the developer Microïds was formed by Elliot Grassiano with assistance from Laurant and Marc to produce simulation software as well as micro and domestic robots. Another firm, Priam, specialised in educational and business software, producing utilities and languages.

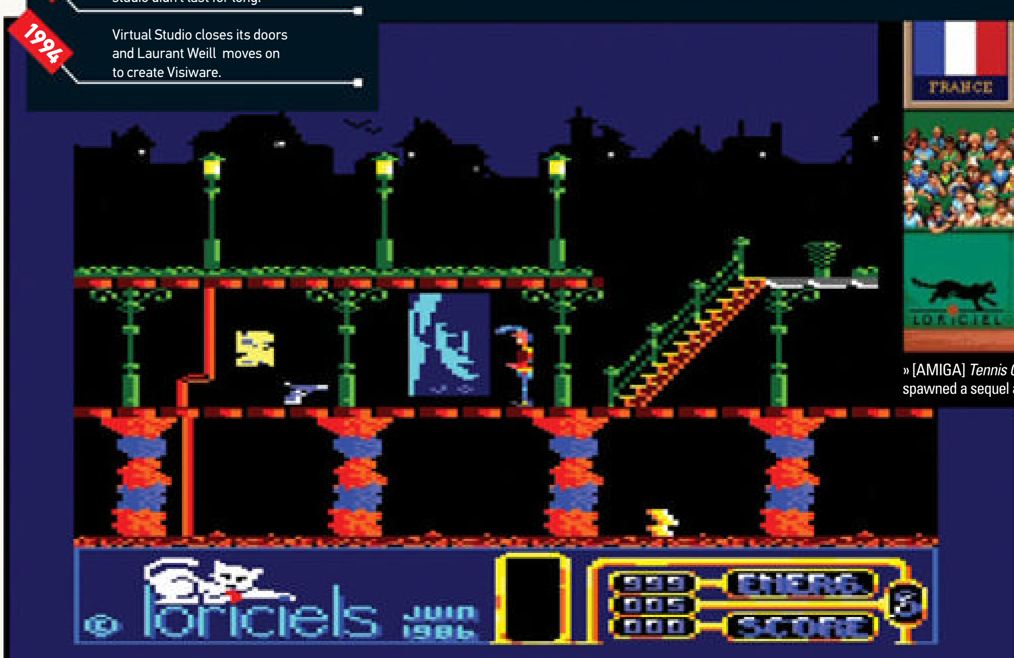
**In 1985, the Amstrad CPC 6128 emerged and it proved to be pivotal to Loriciels' fortunes for much of the remaining Eighties. The computer began to make major in-roads into the hearts of** French gamers and Loriciels quickly began to see it as a primary platform to develop on. Vincent produced the intergalactic action title *3D Fight* for the Amstrad CPC while he was still an actual student. "I much preferred programming videogames than working on electronics design," he says. "So I called Laurant, wondering if he would offer me a full time job. He said 'yes' and so that was the start of a long career in the videogame industry for me."

As well as Vincent, Loriciels began to hire a good number of other young, motivated and talented people to work in-house. "It was not hard to find a job," says Alain. "You just needed to create a game for the most successful computers of the time and meet companies at an Expo. Once you had a couple of games published, you wouldn't have any problems finding contacts and employment."

Since formal qualifications were not a necessity, with recruits only needing a flair for code, the hired programmers turned out to be an eclectic bunch. "Most of them didn't learn computer science at school," recalled Vincent. "One of my colleagues was a pastry cook, another one was a mechanic and most of them didn't have a degree. But all of my colleagues were passionate people. They just learned programming because they were motivated."


» [AMIGA] This cute platformer was certainly not a kids-only title. *Baby Jo* proved to be extremely addictive and equally as hillarious.

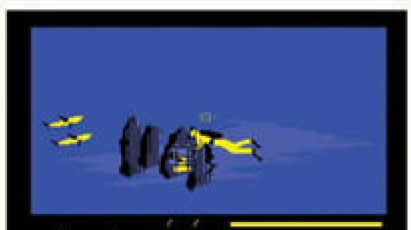

» [Amstrad] There is more than a whiff of *WipEout* to *3D Fight* when you look at it today, only with even faster speeds and more difficult play.



» [Amstrad] In *Billy La Banlieue*, our hero makes his way through the 'banlieue' (or suburbs as we know them) in this beautifully presented platform adventure.



» [AMIGA] *Tennis Cup* had split screen action, making it great for two-player matches. It spawned a sequel as well as a version on the PC-Engine called *Davis Cup Tennis*.


» [Amstrad] *Maracaïbo* is visually impressive but rather dull. Try and find the key to release a diver stuck in a cage.

## ENTENTE CORDIALE

### How Loriciels' games crossed the Channel




**In 1987, Loriciels was seeking to enter the UK market just as Elite Systems was splitting its business, with a development team in Aldridge in Walsall and sales and distribution based in Lichfield, Staffordshire. The latter team was capable of handling more products than Elite could develop so the company was looking to offer 'affiliate distribution', based upon the EA model, to third parties seeking UK representation.**

**"We were aware of Loriciels and thought that its catalogue of original titles would compliment Elite's merchandised range," says Elite boss Steve Wilcox. "The blending of Elite's penchant for merchandising and Loriciels' original game development resulted in a number of notable collaborations including the unforgettable (or do I mean utterly forgettable … I forget), *Eddie The Eagle's Super Ski* for the Atari ST, Amiga and PC.**

**"The Loriciels titles achieved some modest commercial success in the UK coincidental with the connection with Elite. But whilst time distorts the memory, it's probably true that we weren't as wedded to the Loriciels titles as we were to our own and after a period of working together the two companies went their separate ways."**

> "Within 15 months of starting up, Loriciels had become the top publisher in France"
>
> LORICIELS WAS A SWIFT SUCCESS

A good many of the new staff were keen to make games for the CPC. "It was becoming a real success in France probably because it was sold with the TV monitor," continues Vincent. "On the programming side, it was a very interesting machine in that was simple, clean, and came with a lot of ways of utilising its hardware differently. I had a lot of fun programming it." *L'Aigle D'Or* was among the games ported to the machine and it shone brightly on the Amstrad, thanks to it having enhanced graphics and audio, and, as a result of that, many original games followed.

Loriciels was growing fast. "It was simply doubling every year or so," says Vincent. The coders fell into a system which worked well for production. The developers would produce around three to five games internally at the same time and it ensured a good, steady supply of titles. In each case, the main points of a game was discussed with Laurant. "We were then free to decide most of the aspects," says Vincent.

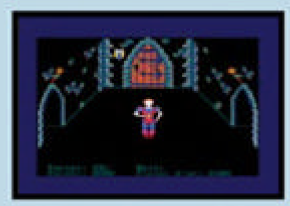
Loriciels moved into larger premises at Rue de la Procession in Rueil-Malmaison in the western suburbs of Paris and it became ever more professional. The results of this could also be seen in its gaming output. "At first, we did not have any test procedures and the games would be released when the programmer decided it was ok," says Vincent. "When the games became more complex and the customers became more demanding, we recruited a small tester team. This changed things a lot. The tester was Vincent Noiret and he was really demanding. He put a lot of pressure on the teams but the end result was a noticeable increase in game quality."

The strong games were having an impact across the world. A third of Loriciels' titles were shipped to Spain and Belgium and deals were struck with Broderbund and Activision. Loriciels earmarked the UK for further expansion as it sought to grow faster and export more widely. In 1987, steps were taken to enter Britain and, at the PCW Show, Laurant said he would create an independent UK company called Loriciels Limited that would use Elite Systems as a distributor. Nikki Penny was taken on as the product manager and at least 14 titles spanning the 8-bits as well as the Atari ST and PC were pencilled in for release during 1988 including *Sapiens* and *500cc Grand Prix*.

The French company was also working with third party developers both in its own country and elsewhere. Ashminster Computing in Leicester was called upon to convert and translate a few of the company's titles to other machines and languages. Among those who worked on such projects was James Harshorn who ported the Commodore 64 version of *Space Racer* in 1988 and touched up the PC version. "Being a conversion house, we had to replicate what was already produced and I remember the usual thing was for the guys to print out the machine language source code to view, leaving the dot matrix on overnight to churn its way through hundreds of pages of printer paper," he says.

Converting games to the Commodore 64 was particularly important in further opening up the UK and US markets. Magazine journalists in those countries would excitedly write of the forthcoming influx of French titles because Loriciels had built a solid reputation for quality since its games were frequently being held back and relentlessly polished up before ▶

## DEFINING GAMES



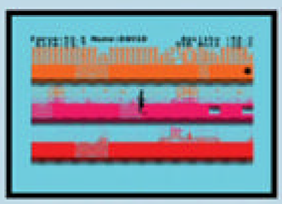
**L'aigle D'Or** 1985

Originally created for the Oric-1, the puzzler *L'aigle d'Or* (or, in English, *The Golden Eagle*) had players searching within a series of dimly lit rooms of a castle for a stolen statue. It combined impressive animation with neat graphics, notably on the Amstrad CPC, which cleverly mixed the resolution modes. This was the game which caught the attention of gamers and cemented Loriciels' early reputation for innovation.



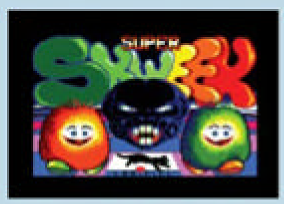
**MGT: The Magnetik Tank** 1986

With a control system that forced you to think ahead, *MGT* was a strange game that where you steered a tank around 55 isometric rooms of a space station in order to reach the exits and destroy the brain that had seized control. It was a logical, puzzler that followed the rules of inertia and had you moving blocks in order to make headway while trying hard not to allow the tank to slide away at speed.



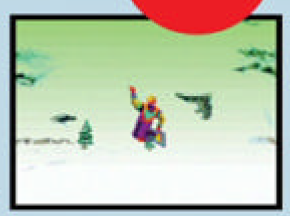
**Le 5eme Axe** 1985

Also known as *The 5th Axis*, this superb platform game had smooth, animation and plenty of opportunity to bash the enemy cyborgs. Players could modify their character according to Force, Agility and Life, all of which affected the fighting, jumping and lasting power of the protagonist. It could get repetitive as you moved up and down though the floors but as a collect-'em-up, it retains an intriguing brand of gameplay.



**Super Skweek** 1990

*Skweek* had already proved a hit in 1989 but *Super Skweek* a year later intensified the gameplay of Loriciel's celebrated debut puzzle game. Both had enabled players to race around, colouring blocks while avoiding the enemy but *Super Skweek* let two people to play at the same time and there was a wide variety of weapons allied with easy controls to keep the interest up. There was certainly a lot of fun to be had with the 255 levels.

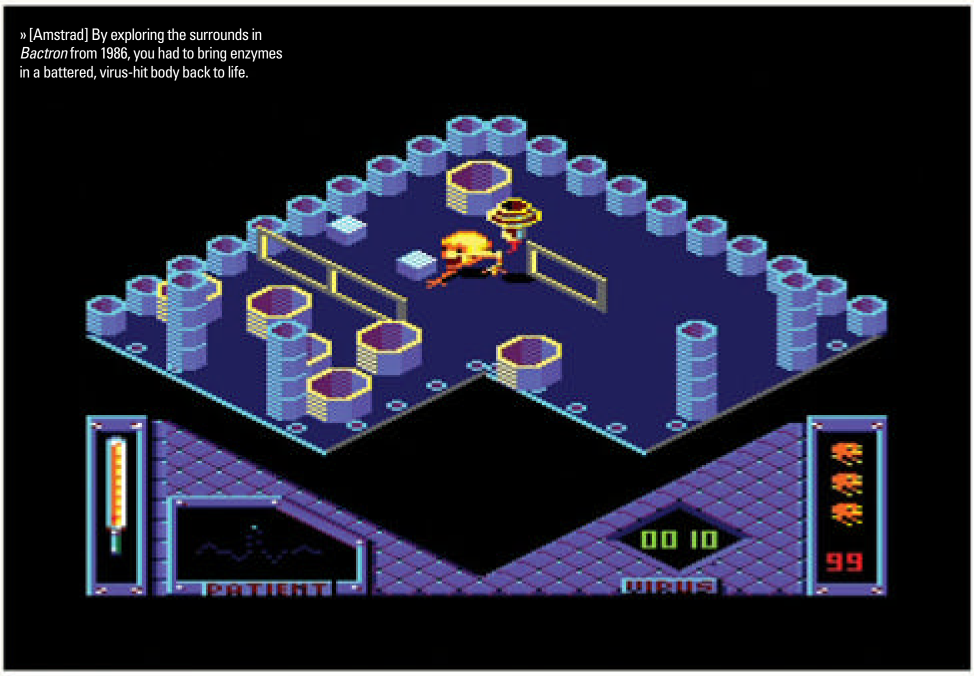


**Val d'Isère Championship** 1994

*Val d'Isère Championship*, or *Tommy Moe's Winter Extreme: Skiing & Snowboarding* as it was also known, was an excellent 3D, Mode 7 ski simulation made exclusively for the SNES which let one or two players to take part in downhill, slalom and giant slalom events. The game had changeable weather and fast action and it showed that Loriciel was able to switch from computers to consoles.

▶ release. "When I was working on *Turbo Cup*, the development was on a par with the schedule yet Laurant decided to postpone the release in order to try to reach the perfect game. It was a good choice: the game was a big success."

> "At first, we did not have any test procedures – games would be released when the programmer decided it was ok"
> VINCENT BAILLET ON THE QUALITY CONTROL



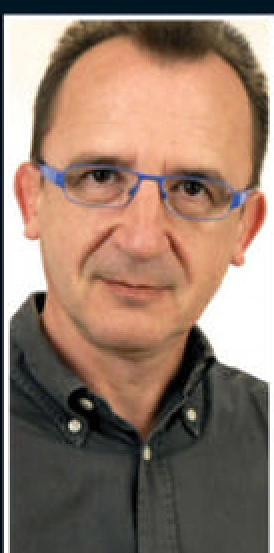

» [Amstrad] By exploring the surrounds in *Bactron* from 1986, you had to bring enzymes in a battered, virus-hit body back to life.

**Loriciels was making a name for itself as an innovative company, too. As soon as new technologies appeared, its development teams would seize upon them and this** followed a clear trend in France where the demo scene was flourishing. Many developers loved to amaze gamers with graphical techniques and it resulted in games such as *Panza Kick Boxing* in 1990 which made early use of rotoscoping. A lightgun was even developed in time for Christmas 1989. Made in Taiwan, the West Phaser looked like an authentic six-shooter and it came bundled with a game called *Sheriffs*. Selling for 349 francs, it allowed developers to build control for the lightgun into their own games which had the effect of kickstarting a small number of third-party titles for the peripheral.

All the while, the company avoided treading too deeply into the world of licenses and it stuck to its strengths. Pierre Valls, the editor of *Amstrad Cent Pour Cent*, the leading CPC magazine in France, said the English, for example, were more interested in shoot-'em-ups rather than the various adventure arcade games being produced across the Channel but Loriciels didn't overtly change its direction to suit. If a game became a worldwide hit – like *Skweek* – then it was celebrated but there was a sense that the company would not be losing sleep if it did not.

And yet despite all of these successes, Marc left the company to concentrate on Priams in 1989 and, the following year, Loriciels was hit by financial problems. There was a reorganisation and a slight tweak to the name: the 's' was dropped and the company became Loriciel SA. In hindsight, it was the beginning of the end for the company and while Vincent is staying quiet

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

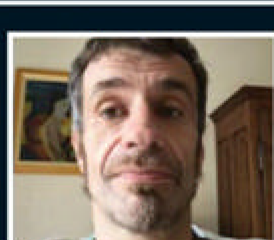


### Vincent Baillet

Having left his role of producer at Loriciel in 1994, Vincent went on to manage a 40-strong development team at Sony Psygnosis until 1999 before becoming a director at French publisher Infogrammes for just over two years. He has spent this century freelancing and producing smartphone and tablet apps.

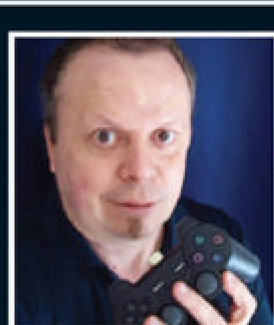
### Laurant Weill

Laurant founded Visiware in 1994 and now he's its executive chairman as he celebrates his 21st year with the company. The firm has worked on games for Sky Digital's pay TV platform and has produced second-screen technology that enabled people to play along with shows like *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*.



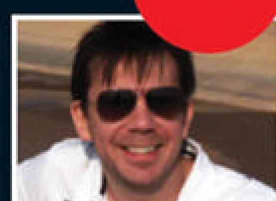
### Jean-François Graffard

He may not have been too keen on a career in the videogaming industry prior to joining Loriciel, but having worked for Virtual Studio and been reacquainted with Laurant Weill at Visiware where he worked as a lead game designer and game producer, he decided to make the move to Ubisoft in 2009 and worked for the gigantic French publisher as a senior game designer.



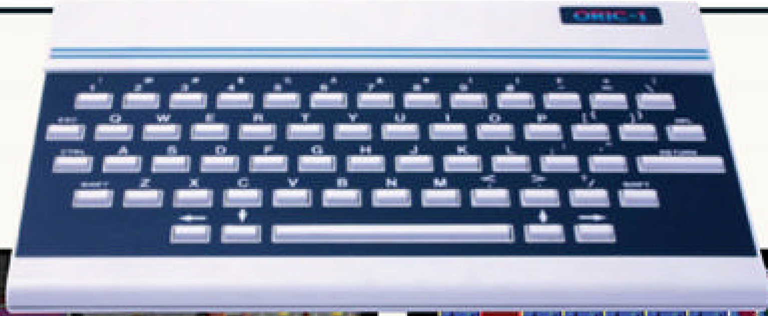
### Alain Fernandes

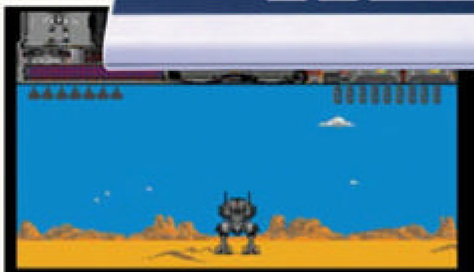
Alain converted *Titan* for the PlayStation Vita, browsers, PCs and Macs in 2014 but his 35-year career in gaming has seen him work for a wide number of companies including Titus, Ubisoft, Renders, Ocean France, Mindscape and Otaboo. He continues to work in the games industry today.



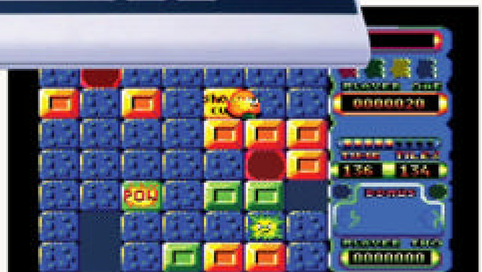
### James Hartshorn

James left Ashminster Computing in 1991 and went on to work as a graphic artist for Cygnus Software, CAJJI Software, Codemasters and the IDA Creative Group. He left the games industry because he is a singer at the weekends and he was struggling to juggle the work between the two. But he is currently the director of Rendition Software which produces 3D designs for retail companies. He even still plays gigs at the weekends.





» [AMIGA] Slammed by *Amiga Power*, scorned by *Amiga Format* and given a derisory half-an-X out of five in *Games-X*, was *Thunder Burner*.



» [Amstrad] *Skweek* was one of Loriciel's most popular titles and the resulting sequels worked well for the publisher in the Nineties.

on what was going behind the scenes at this time – "There have been rumours about this but I do not talk about rumours," he says – more trouble was to come.

Even so, the games kept coming and Loriciel continued its move toward 16-bit computers, taking the changes in its stride. "The main thing with 16-bit computers was that we had to program in C which was a bit strange for assembly language specialists but that was fun to learn," says Vincent. The teams seemed to enjoy having the extra memory to hand. "There was so much memory to waste since the Atari ST had 512k of RAM versus 64k for the CPC," says Vincent. "After some time learning the new languages, it was great fun to work on 16-bit machines."

Console development proved rather trickier, though, not only in terms of coding – "The hardware of the SNES was a bit strange but it did allow for a lot of creative solutions," Vincent says – but in publishing. Console development was a relatively tight closed shop. It required strict licensing and up-front payments. There could have been a temptation to stick with the CPC which, in 1992 was accounting for 40 per per cent of Loriciel's total software sales (*Amstrad Action* reported this was twice as many as any other single format) but the demise of the 8-bits was inevitable.

"Some CPC games did sell a lot," says Vincent. "I enjoyed playing Loriciel's games like *MGT*, *Bactron* and *3D Fight* on the machine but the company had to move on. When we started working on consoles it also became difficult to sell just in France. Nintendo policy required publishers to sell a lot of games and France was not a big enough market, obviously." So despite releasing *Baby Jo*, *Guardians* and the shmup *Thunder Burner* on home computers and earmarking *Panza Kick Boxing* and *Copter 271* for the Amstrad GX4000, it made a push towards Sega and Nintendo.

Unfortunately, Loriciel began to fall into big trouble. The company had been producing *Val d'Isère Championship* for the SNES and the rumours were that it was an expensive development process that was putting pressure on Loriciel's finances. Vincent strongly denies this, saying, "it had been a cheap development with a small team, short development and no delay and it sold well." He also insists, "Loriciel already had some financial difficulties before this great project". But whatever the reasoning behind it, the outcome was ultimately the same: the company was forced to file for bankruptcy.

One person who saw the resulting fallout of this most starkly was Jean-François Graffard who had joined the programming team at the age of 23 following a stint in advertising for an agency. "I arrived at the end of the adventure," he laments. "The day after I arrived, I learned that the company had filed for bankruptcy but this did not dampen my enthusiasm."

**Jean-François worked on a vertical scrolling action adventure game based on the 1844 novel, *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas. Laurant believed the recognisable** name and the advantage of the franchise being out of copyright would help the company's finances and Jean-François worked on the gameplay mechanics and the level design until the game was eventually ready for the SNES and the Mega Drive.

But the financial problems were hitting the company hard. Even though Loriciel was set to be reborn as Virtual Studio, retaining most of the former firm's developers, *The Three Musketeers* was ultimately canned. "Unfortunately, the dream was cut short," says Jean-François who believes the company had failed to keep up with the changing gaming landscape. It was not as if Loriciel had been extravagant – *The Three Musketeers* had a development team of just two programmers: graphic designer and Jean-François, working as a team.

But Jean-François says that "the gaming world was changing and it demanded a total overhaul of the development process with more emphasis on management and less focus on craftsmanship. It needed more structure including more professional input from people in charge of the schedules, development and marketing."

Even so, he enjoyed his last months at Loriciel. "The atmosphere in the company was excellent," he says. "It was kind of like joining friends to do stuff that fascinated us – geeks who took maximum pleasure to meet, 'work' and play. We talked constantly about videogames we liked." Virtual Studio limped on with some Atari Jaguar titles before eventually closing in 1994. The journey had come to an end.

"Virtual Studio approached videogaming differently to Loriciel and while it was a nice experience for me, it was not as exhilarating for me," says Jean-François. Laurant went on to found Visiware in 1994 and Jean-François joined this new and exciting company. "Visiware was an absolutely crazy project but it fascinated me," says Jean-François. "It was offering games on a digital decoder which was advertised as the next TV revolution. My desire was to quickly reach and join Visiware, which I eventually did, in order to start a new, long adventure…" *

FROM THE ARCHIVES: LORICIELS

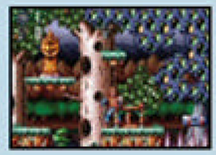
# THE DNA OF LORICIELS

## Oric-1 computer



Without the success of the Oric-1 computer and the booming sales of software at Laurant Weill's Parisian computer shop, Loriciels may never have been born.

## Innovation



Whether it was bundling 3D glasses with *Jim Power: The Lost Dimension* in 3-D or chucking a frisbee into Disc, Loriciels was known for pushing boundaries.

## Originality



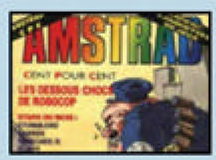
Loriciels would write for a French market first and foremost and it would concentrate on producing original titles rather than pursuing lazy movie tie-ins.

## L'aigle D'Or



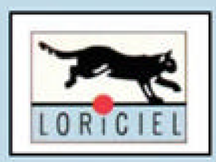
This was a flagship title for Loriciels, not only making it the kind of money it needed for its future but bringing a stunning, influential adventure to the table.

## Communication



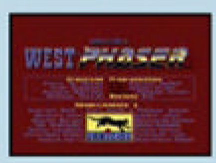
Very early on, Loriciels created a publicity and marketing department, understanding that getting the word out about games was crucial to success.

## Ambition




Although it was French company, it did look to export as many of its products as possible although it would only earmark those it felt would work well overseas.

## Technology



Not only did Loriciels produce the West Phaser lightgun, made in Taiwan in alliance with the French firm, it produced a joystick which could be stuck to a keyboard.

## Financial problems



The company found it rather difficult to move towards console development and the experience with them unfortunately helped it towards bankruptcy.



# TWIS MET

**What do you get when you strap a rocket launcher to a car? One of the PlayStation's most memorable cult classics, of course! Nick Thorpe revisits the long-running series with David Jaffe and Michael Riccio…**



» David Jaffe

» Michael Riccio

**Gridlock is the quickest route to anger. We don't have any data to back that up, but trust us, it's true. Even in a place as accustomed to queuing as the UK, the simple act of waiting in line inspires explosive rage when experienced from the inside of a machine designed specifically for the act of moving fast – and** this afflicts everyone from boy racers to mild-mannered anger management experts. Given that fact, you might not be surprised to hear that vehicular mayhem of long-running PlayStation franchise *Twisted Metal* has its roots in a traffic jam.

"Myself, Mike Giam, and Allan Becker at Sony Imagesoft had gone out to Evans & Sutherland, who were the pioneers of real-time 3D graphics," explains David Jaffe, co-creator of the *Twisted Metal* series. The company was best known as a producer of military simulations, but had become sought



### "TWISTED METAL 101"

■ Each *Twisted Metal* game depicts a vehicular combat tournament, in which drivers compete to be the last man standing by destroying their opponents with machine guns, missiles and all manner of special abilities. The winner is granted a single wish by the mysterious tournament organiser, Calypso, whose abilities seem to defy reality.





» [PlayStation] The original *Twisted Metal* took place solely in Los Angeles, a nod to the game's conception.

**"I was in the depths of dispair, you know, like, 'what the f**k, I'm finished before I start!'"**

David Jaffe

▶ by game developers for its expertise in 3D visuals. "We had never seen games and interactive spaces like that, so our minds were swimming with possibilities. On the way back, being at the LAX airport, being in all the traffic and stuff it was like 'oh, rocket launchers on cars', very standard fantasies when you're stuck in traffic and grew up with films like *Road Warrior*…"

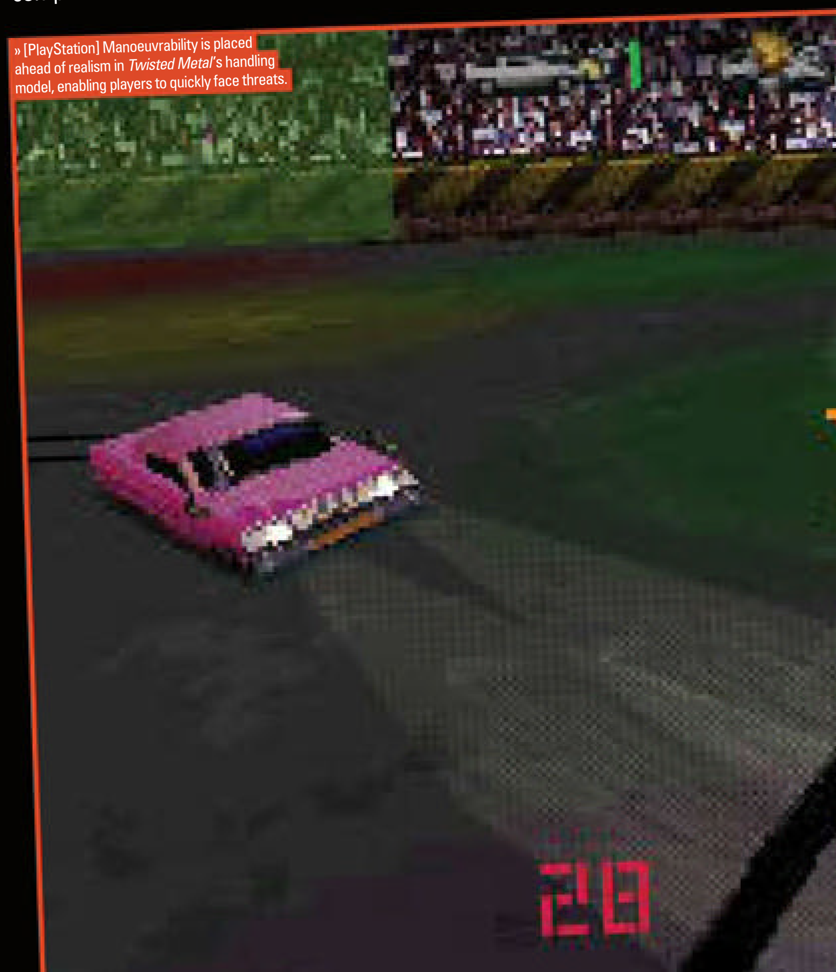
Mel Gibson's post-apocalyptic adventure was just one of a diverse set of influences that David and the team drew upon. "We were inspired by car chases from great action movies, *Car Wars* from Steve Jackson Games and things like *Autoduel*," notes the designer. Turning that into a videogame wasn't hard, either. "Merge that with the sensibilities both mechanically and thematically of *Mortal Kombat*, which we were really into at the time – *Mario Kart* battle mode was a big influence as well." This initial concept become the formula for *Twisted Metal* – drive around 3D environments, blow up other drivers and be the last man standing, with the winner receiving a single wish from the enigmatic tournament organiser, Calypso. These wishes went horribly wrong for their recipients, more often than not.

*Twisted Metal* wasn't the only game that SingleTrac was developing for Sony at the time, as *Warhawk* was also being developed by the team. "There were two separate teams, but there was a lot of cross-pollination," David explains, "effects were shared, sounds were shared, massive swathes of code were shared. You'll see Warthog in *Twisted Metal* has swarmer missiles that are the exact swarmer missiles from *Warhawk*." However, as development wore on it seemed as if *Twisted Metal* was destined to flop. "*Warhawk* was really the golden child for the longest time. We did one focus test and they all loved *Warhawk* and they just thought *Twisted Metal* was utter shit, and I was like 'that's it, my career's over.'" Players weren't the only ones who didn't seem to care for the game either, as the developer recalls. "I remember Worldwide Marketing came in, and we were showing them all the games and they could not have cared any less for *Twisted Metal*, but *Warhawk* came up and it was like 'oh my god, this is amazing' and I was in the depths of despair, you know, like 'what the f**k, I'm finished before I start!'"

Despite the pre-launch concerns, *Twisted Metal* was a success both critically and commercially. *Electronic Gaming Monthly* crowned it 1995's Game Of The Year, a strong accolade which capped off a set of reviews which were good, but expressed some reservations. **Play** awarded the game 78%, commenting that the multiplayer combat "provides the kind of laughs you'd expect when you get to murder your friends in cold blood," but expressed disappointment with the game stating that it "only lasts a bit longer than the average motorway snarl-up." *Twisted Metal* became a fixture of college dorms in North America and went on to sell over a million copies in that territory, though sales elsewhere were less impressive.

**Before these results were in, the team was already looking to do a follow-up project, though as David remembers it wasn't strictly a sequel to *Twisted Metal*. "We knew we wanted to work with SingleTrac again because it had** been a really good relationship and it was a great developer, but we were convinced that *Twisted Metal* was going to be a 'dead in the water' title because we thought the physics were too wonky and the controls were too esoteric." To solve these problems, the team explored a variety of different concepts that moved away from the use of conventional vehicles. "We had a flooded New York City with a Statue Of Liberty and hover-taxis travelling around it, and the reason we did that was so we could get strafing into the game, which at the time was a much more accepted, understandable way to use the controller. We also explored making them insects, so they were going to become like an insect fighting game so we could slow the speed down. Obviously once [*Twisted Metal*] hit the market and found a legion of fans, at least in America, that all went out the window."

*Twisted Metal 2: World Tour* was a sequel that implemented the usual improvements such as better visuals and larger stages, this time themed around international cities, but offered a lot more besides. Each level was more interactive, with plenty of secrets to discover. A two-player co-operative mode was also added to the game, providing a welcome addition to the excellent competitive multiplayer of the original. However, the biggest



» [PlayStation] Manoeuvrability is placed ahead of realism in *Twisted Metal*'s handling model, enabling players to quickly face threats.

# WARPED WARRIORS

**Meet some of the most memorable combatants to engage in the Twisted Metal tournament's automotive aggression**



### MR GRIMM
■ With all the death inherent in Twisted Metal tournaments, it's natural that the reaper himself should be interested. He's no longer in the business of ferrying souls to their destination, and has now become hooked on devouring them. Controlled by his hunger, Mr Grimm's wishes always involve his dark cravings.

### AXEL
■ Axel's father forced him into a hellish two-wheeled contraption, in which he remained for over 20 years. Axel's wish is to be free – when he achieves this, he finds that life without it is impossible. He regains the ability to drive it, but at the cost of fighting for someone else.

### NEEDLES KANE
■ Sweet Tooth's driver is the face of *Twisted Metal*, appearing in every game with his iconic mask and flaming head. The events of the games often revolve around this psychotic killer – indeed, at times it is implied that the tournament is the product of his broken psyche, and that he is the natural heir to Calypso. His wish changes in each game.

### CARL ROBERTS
■ At the conclusion of the first game, Outlaw's driver, Sergeant Carl Roberts, attempts to deliver the people of LA from the destruction of Twisted Metal by wishing to live in a world without the tournament – only to be sent to outer space. Having been rescued by his sister, Jamie Roberts, he is determined to stop Calypso once and for all.

### KRISTA SPARKS
■ She faked her age to join the Twisted Metal tournament, with no wish other than to meet Calypso – the father she thought dead. If the driver of Grasshopper can win the tournament and her desired reunion, the revelations are bound to be explosive!

### MARCUS KANE
■ Roadkill's driver has been homeless for years. As a conspiracy theorist, he believes that the world of *Twisted Metal* is not real and desires to return to a normal life. Given his surname, we suspect that he might not be who he thinks he is.




change to the gameplay was the addition of advanced moves, which added to the depth of the game by enabling players to activate defensive and secondary offensive moves at any time via button combinations.

Released in 1996, *Twisted Metal 2: World Tour* represents one of the high points for the series. As well as once again exceeding a million sales in North America, the game was well-loved by critics, with a 9/10 from the *Official PlayStation Magazine UK* representative of the overall feeling towards the game. David also considers it to be the high water mark in terms of gameplay, stating, "out of all the games I've ever worked on, that's the only game I can go back to and genuinely be engaged in the moment to moment mechanics of the game." However, sales outside of North America were again disappointing, so the remainder of the PlayStation entries in that series were exclusive to that region.

Following *Twisted Metal: World Tour*, the original creative team behind the series disbanded and development was passed to Sony's 989 Studios as a result. David remained at Sony but moved on to other projects, while SingleTrac and Sony parted ways as the developer felt that it wasn't receiving adequate rewards based on the success of the series, removing key creatives such as Scott Campbell and Kellan Hatch. ▶



» [PlayStation] FMV endings were filmed for *Twisted Metal*, but dropped as they offended key developers.




» [PlayStation] Moving the sequel out of LA allowed for much more diverse environments.



» [PlayStation] Competitors introduced in *Twisted Metal III*, such as Flower Power, didn't last long in the series.





» [PlayStation] Some of *Twisted Metal III*'s stages featured existing damage from natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions.

Programmer Michael Riccio, who now works alongside David Jaffe at The Bartlet Jones Supernatural Detective Agency, was part of the *Twisted Metal* team at 989 Studios.

The change of developer brought a fresh start for the series. "It was a completely new engine, no code was shared between *Twisted Metal 2: World Tour* and *Twisted Metal III*," Michael explains. One of the most heavily-promoted features of the new engine was its *TruPhysics* engine, which had come across from another PlayStation game. "The lead programmer, Jim Buck, had worked on *Rally Cross* and had a vehicle physics simulation. It was basically Jell-O physics, it was a cube with with springs connecting the vertices, which is old news now but at the time it was a real innovation. So he brought a lot of the *Rally Cross* engine to *Twisted Metal III* – heavily modded, but physics came over, which was kind of controversial for the game players. They expected exactly the same feel as *Twisted Metal* and *Twisted Metal 2*, but the game was fundamentally different."

**That wasn't the only change. *Twisted Metal III* introduced a four-player mode which was very welcome indeed, but other differences weren't quite so enthusiastically received.** "We didn't have the sick, twisted David Jaffe involved in it, so the tone was tempered somewhat," Michael explains, as the comedic tone of the game took precedence ahead of the darker aspects of the story, introducing a number of new characters including Granny Dread and Keith Flint lookalike Damien Coles. The game also included a licensed soundtrack for the first time, drawing on popular industrial metal artists Rob Zombie and Pitchshifter.

*Twisted Metal III* launched to a poor critical reception in October 1998. The soundtrack was heavily praised and the visuals received a mixed reception, but reviewers complained that the game's level design was of a low standard and that the new physics model was detrimental to the game, due to the frequency with which your car would flip over. The majority of critics suggested that players try competing titles such as *Vigilante 8* and *Rogue Trip* instead, but *Twisted Metal III* managed to sell well regardless, again shifting over a million copies.

*Twisted Metal 4* was developed to a punishing schedule, as Michael recalls. "We had a year, but the reality was normal hours for the first six months and then just crunching, working weekends – it was brutal." The tough schedule took its toll on the staff – "I wouldn't say that everyone liked each other after the project was done," laughs Michael. "But we got four months off at the end, so it was worth it at that age." The fourth game in the



## THE SCRAPYARD

**These Twisted Metal concepts were broken down for parts before hitting the shelves…**

Over the years, details have emerged regarding various scrapped *Twisted Metal* projects. The first of these was *Twisted Metal: Harbor City*, a PlayStation 2 sequel to *Twisted Metal: Black* which was started in 2003. Though the game was scrapped, four stages and a new character, Severed Sam, had been completed, and the remnants of the game were included in *Twisted Metal Head-On: Extra Twisted Edition* as *Twisted Metal Lost*. This was accompanied by a story which explained that the game was left unfinished due to the deaths of six key members of the team – though this turned out to be fake. Other scrapped concepts were intended for the PlayStation 3. The first was *Twisted Metal: Apocalypse*, a game for which some design work exists, including art of Needles Kane in a gas mask. This wasn't to the taste of co-director Scott Campbell, who isn't a fan of post-apocalyptic themes. Another theme involved a more urban style, with more realistic depictions of characters as gang members. Neither of these concepts made it to any kind of playable product, with the PlayStation 3 *Twisted Metal* eventually taking a relatively traditional approach to the established narrative of the series.

## SWEET RIDES

**Over 50 individual vehicles have appeared in the *Twisted Metal* series – here are some of our favourites**

### SWEET TOOTH
SPECIAL ATTACK: Napalm Cone

HANDLING:

SPEED:

ARMOR:

SPECIAL WEAPON:



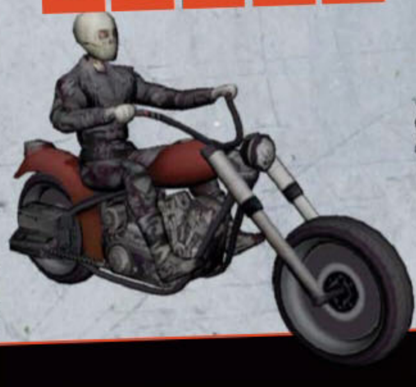
### MR GRIMM
SPECIAL ATTACK: Death Spawn

HANDLING:

SPEED:

ARMOR:

SPECIAL WEAPON:



### THUMPER
SPECIAL ATTACK: Megafire

HANDLING:

SPEED:

ARMOR:

SPECIAL WEAPON:






» [PS2] A grimy, blackened colour palette set *Twisted Metal: Black* apart from its vibrant predecessors.

**"I wouldn't say that everyone liked each other after the project was done but we got four months off at the end"**
Michael Riccio

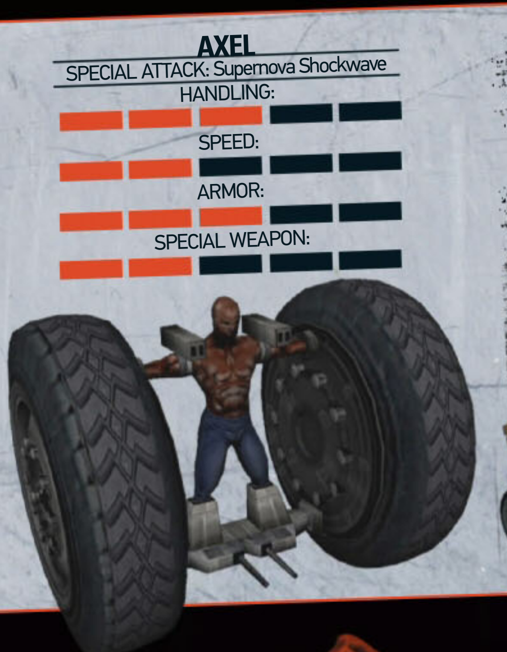
series brought about a major storyline change, as Calypso was no longer in charge of proceedings – instead, Sweet Tooth driver Needles Kane was running things. The former antagonist joined the cast of playable drivers, alongside a range of new characters such as Pizza Boy and Rob Zombie (yes, *that* Rob Zombie) and retooled versions of old ones such as Captain Grimm. The game also featured more interactive environmental attacks, softened physics and the ability to create your own vehicle.

When *Twisted Metal 4* released in 1999, the reviewers recognised the game as a marked improvement over its predecessor and gave it a more positive reception overall. However, it was definitely good rather than great – IGN's Marc Nix summed up the overall mood in a 6/10 review, stating "You may have fun, as I did, but you won't feel a brush with greatness from the once towering *Twisted Metal* series."

Despite the improvements made by 989 Studios in just a year, the fans were at odds with the 989 Studios team. "There were fan sites that popped up that were all about the first two games. They slammed *Twisted Metal III* and *Twisted Metal 4*, like they weren't even part of the series, they were crap," Michael remembers. "I remember we went to a conference, where Kelly Flock gave a presentation about developing sequels for videogames. We left, and some kid came up to us and was just totally angry, like 'why did you do this, why did you change that?' I had never experienced that, a crazy disgruntled fan – I didn't get exposure to the fans at that time. I thought it was kind of funny, it shocked both of us." Fortunately for the series, the situation was soon resolved by the formation of Incog Inc., a new studio which was formed primarily of ex-SingleTrac staff. David also returned to the series at this time, so with the original team was back in charge, the continuity and concepts introduced in the 989 Studios games were quickly discarded, never to return.

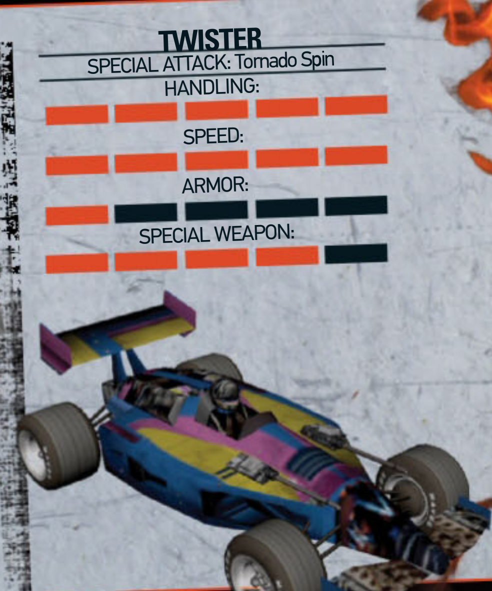
**In the summer of 2001, *Twisted Metal: Black* launched on PlayStation 2. "I was at a point where I was much more interested in the world and the story," explains David of the dark reboot. Set in a blackened world, the game was** framed as a contest between mental asylum patients and featured the darkest story to date, filled with revenge killings and all manner of horrific acts. In fact the story was considered to be too dark for the European audience, which was receiving its first *Twisted Metal* game in five years, and all story content including a full hour of FMV was removed from the PAL release. Even the American scenes were toned down from the original intent – one particular scene featuring newcomer Preacher drowning an infant was considered to be a step too far.

It was a triumphant return for the original team, though. *Twisted Metal: Black* was a critical success, attracting near-universal praise. Reviewers were impressed with the level design, which allowed just about everything to be blown up, maimed or broken in some fashion, and the visual design of the game. Praise was also reserved for the soundtrack, which was filled with original orchestral compositions rather than the licensed tunes of the previous games. Sales were excellent, and the multiplayer portion of the game received an online-enabled release to support the PS2 Network Adapter. However, it isn't David's favourite entry in the series to play. "The gameplay, the mechanics of it, I thought were good – we put a lot of work into them as a team – but I think it got too fast for a game like that. It felt better for a lot of people because they felt more like cars, but there were a larger number of people that could sit down and play *Twisted Metal 2* and have a genuine sense of depth. I









# INTREPID EXPLODER

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## STATUE OF LIBERTY

LOCATION: New York, USA
GAME: Twisted Metal 2: World Tour

■ You can't get up close to it, but you can trigger a three-part destruction sequence. The first stage lights the torch, the second sees it break away to reveal a bikini-clad lady, and the last destroys it fully.

## BIG BEN

LOCATION: London, UK
GAME: *Twisted Metal III*

■ To destroy the Elizabeth Tower (and Big Ben with it), position yourself on the ramp facing the clock and bombard it with missiles – you'll soon bring it crashing down.





## TOKYO TOWER

LOCATION: Tokyo, Japan
GAME: Twisted Metal: Head-On

■ Given that Tokyo's iconic tower was inspired by the Eiffel Tower, it's natural for the *Twisted Metal* crew to want to blow it up. A bomb placed underneath the tower will take out TV and radio services for the populous metropolis.




## GREAT SPHINX

LOCATION: Giza, Egypt
GAME: Twisted Metal III

■ Half-buried by the desert sands, the Great Sphinx has clearly been affected by the ravages of time. While you can't outright destroy it, giving the ancient landmark a good whack with a missile changes its facial expression.

## HOLLYWOOD SIGN

LOCATION: Los Angeles, USA
GAME: Twisted Metal III

■ The tournament's host city is a wreck by the time its third iteration rolls around, but the iconic Hollywood sign remains intact. One good hit from a missile is all it takes to correct this unfortunate oversight!

## EIFFEL TOWER

LOCATION: Paris, France
GAME: Twisted Metal 2: World Tour

■ Detonating a bomb in this famous landmark doesn't just look cool. When it explodes, the half of the tower will topple over and create a pathway to the rooftops of Paris.







» [PlayStation] The use of radio-controlled cars in large environments is often reminiscent of *Re-Volt*.

think with *Twisted Metal Black* we had reached a smaller group of an already small group of players."

The fifth and final outing on the original PlayStation arrived just a few months after *Twisted Metal: Black*, and stood in sharp contrast to it. As the average age of PlayStation owners was falling, *Twisted Metal: Small Brawl* was a kid-friendly spin-off featuring young drivers battling radio controlled cars in huge environments. With Incog Inc. at the helm, the game returned to the classic *Twisted Metal: World Tour* physics model and it felt more like a *Twisted Metal* game than either of the previous PlayStation instalments. With the PlayStation 2 and *Twisted Metal: Black* on the scene the game passed by largely unnoticed, and contemporary reviews were negative, complaining of poor visuals and uninteresting level design.

**The series then went on hiatus for the first time, with a few years passing before *Twisted Metal: Head-On* arrived on the PSP, becoming the first portable entry in the series. The game was a direct sequel to** *Twisted Metal: World Tour* and once again focused on a range of international locations, with new and iconic locations such as Athens and Rome joining past favourites such Paris and Tokyo. Vehicles and characters were also generally drawn from the past releases, and *Head-On*'s ending stories continued from those in *World Tour*. The biggest new gameplay addition was the inclusion of mid-stage mini-games which saw players avoiding obstacles against the clock, with unlockable characters and extra power-ups available as rewards.

*Twisted Metal: Head-On* reviewed well, with similar criticisms as the first game – it was good in single-player but far better with human opposition. Additionally, the analogue control scheme was roundly criticised as being over-responsive and just plain odd, as accelerate and brake were mapped to up and down. An enhanced version of *Twisted Metal: Head-On* entitled *Extra Twisted Edition* was released for the PS2 in North America in 2008, and contained an extra stage and enhanced visuals, as well as a variety of extras for hardcore fans.

The most recent outing in the series was simply titled *Twisted Metal*, and rebooted the series on PlayStation 3. The original outline was for a very minimal experience, as David explains. "We had started a company called Eat Sleep Play, and we had gone to Sony and said 'hey, we want to do a small, downloadable-only version of *Twisted Metal*, we don't think it can sustain a $60 price point.'" The move seems shrewd in light of how downloadable games have taken off, but this was early in the PS3's life cycle and the market wasn't yet understood. "I remember there were business execs at Sony who were like 'we don't know how that's going to sell, that's not viable, we know how to put things in boxes and sell them.'" With that, David and the team set out to make a final full title.

2012's *Twisted Metal* was another reboot, and was unusual in that the single-player campaign was stripped back to just three characters – Needles Kane, Mr Grimm and a new Krista Sparks character. Stories unconnected to the *Twisted Metal: World Tour* character. Stories were told through live action FMV cutscenes, a nod to the ones which were ultimately scrapped from the original game. The campaign included a variety of different event types, including actual racing events for the first time, but the multiplayer was once again the focus of attention – to the extent that David himself took the unusual precaution of advising players to rent the game if single-player action was their biggest interest.

The first and only PS3 entry in the series received good reviews, with praise for the core action tempered by problems with the online component – **GamesTM** awarded the title 7/10, referencing frequent network errors and an anachronistic interface. Reflecting on the title, David says: "to Sony's credit, *Twisted Metal* came out and I think it wasn't a massive hit, but it certainly did better than we thought it could do at $60. But it really did stretch development way more than we wanted it to – it ended up being a three-year project, because it was just a long time to make all that content for such a small team." After the release of *Twisted Metal* for PS3, David stated that he had no plans to work on *Twisted Metal* for a very long time, and Sony hasn't given any indication that the series will be appearing on its current platforms. There has also been little news of the film adaptation, which is reportedly being written and directed by Brian Taylor (best known for *Crank* and *Ghost Rider: Spirit Of Vengeance*), since it was announced in 2012.

For now then, it seems that the carnage of *Twisted Metal* has finally come to a halt. However, it has certainly left some impressive scorch marks on the landscape of the gaming industry, ranking alongside the likes of *Gran Turismo* as one of the longest-running PlayStation exclusive series, providing a great deal of memorable action and a distinctive cast of characters. And we certainly wouldn't be surprised if the series did make a return in the future – because if there's one thing a dedicated *Twisted Metal* fan knows, it's that Calypso has an incredible talent for getting the last laugh. *


» [PSP] Fan favourite real-world locations such as Egypt were revisited in *Twisted Metal: Head-On*.


» [PS3] Some of the special attacks in *Twisted Metal*, such as the Sweet Bot transformation here, are absurd.

## WRITE-OFFS

**Twisted Metal has inspired rivals over the years – here's a few of them…**

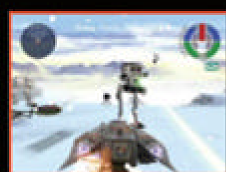


### VIGILANTE 8 1998:

■ Luxoflux's spin-off of *Interstate 76* was arguably the best of *Twisted Metal*'s competitors, thanks to its unique style, excellent visuals, and strong level design.

### ROGUE TRIP: VACATION 2012 1998:

■ SingleTrac came up with a unique spin on car combat which sees players carrying tourists to post-apocalyptic sightseeing spots.

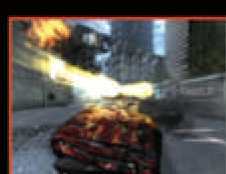


### STAR WARS: DEMOLITION 2000

■ Keen to milk the *Star Wars* licence dry, Activision pulled in Luxoflux to create a vehicular combat spin-off with the *Vigilante 8: 2nd Offense* engine.

### WWE CRUSH HOUR 2003

■ We're not sure if we needed a WWE vehicular combat game, but Pacific Coast Power And Light thought otherwise.



### FULL AUTO 2006

■ Pseudo Interactive reintroduced racing to the genre, as well as an 'unwreck' mechanic which allowed players to rewind time.

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"I believed then and I still believe now that games are the artform of the 21st Century"
Andrew Hewson

In the chair with...

# ANDREW HEWSON

Andrew Hewson is marking the 35th anniversary of his software company – Hewson Consultants – by writing a book about the classic games he helped publish and the people he worked with. Andrew Fisher joins him on a nostalgic trip

**Family was important to Hewson Consultants. Now, his son Rob is working with him on the book telling Hewson's history. The name *Hints & Tips for Videogame Pioneers* was inspired by Andrew's first programming book and he also looks back fondly to the many people he worked with over the years. Andrew can look back on a long and successful track record. Through his books, many people learned how to make their own games and submitted them to Hewson for publishing. Let's begin at the start of the story.**

**So when did you first see a computer?**
In the Seventies I worked in the Radiocarbon Laboratory at the British Museum, dating sites such as Stonehenge, Grime's Graves and Knossos in Crete. The Museum bought a Hewlett Packard HP2100C in November 1973 and put it in the science lab for us to play with. I found it absolutely fascinating. I converted an Algol program to run on it that the lab had previously run on a London University IBM 360 located about half a mile away. My interest was piqued and later in the decade I used to go across to Tottenham Court Road during my lunch hour to gaze in awe at the Commodore PET.

The penny really dropped a year or two later when I was out with my then boss watching him drool over a Teletext TV. There I was mocking it for various technical reasons because of my experience with more powerful systems and all he could say was, 'I don't care! I want one!' I think that's when I first realised just how seductive new technology could be, even if it wasn't totally cutting edge, when it was packaged up in a consumer product that people could own for themselves.

By the time the ZX80 launched I had left the British Museum and joined the flood studies team at the Institute Of Hydrology in Oxfordshire. I went to the bank, borrowed £500, and bought a ZX80, a small TV, a cassette player, an old desk at an auction and a battered typewriter from a second-hand shop. I promised myself and told my wife, that I was going to make some money out of the ZX80 so that the investment wouldn't be wasted.

I soon realised that the documentation that came with the ZX80 was pretty rudimentary and so I peeked and poked at the machine, writing a few simple programs including crude games like *Hangman* and recording notes about everything I figured out. My wife typed up those notes while pregnant with our second child and we used the exciting new technology of photocopying to create the book.

It was crude by today's standards, but I took out tiny ads in *Personal Computing World* and *Practical Computing* and, glory be, cheques and postal orders started landing on the doormat. The whole process took four or five months.

**What made you write your first computer book?**
When I came to write up my research work on Ashanti goldweights, I discovered that I couldn't write very well. This failing niggled away at me and I was looking for an opportunity to overcome it.

**What was your big break?**
The books I wrote led to a phone call from the company setting up *Sinclair User* and they asked me to write the Hewson Helpline column, which appeared in every issue until the magazine finally




» The Hewson Helpline gave advice in *Sinclair User* for a decade.

closed a decade or so later. In the early years, that had a huge effect in terms of getting my name out there in front of budding programmers. The result was that we started to receive cassettes through the mail, about ten per day at its peak, from people wanting us to publish their games.

We were incredibly selective right from the beginning, because, in all honesty, most of the games we received were not very good. It would never have occurred to me to put anything on the market that I didn't think was a really great product, and the result was that we began to sign up some of the best programmers in the country. I also think my technical background helped a great deal because we respected and understood our programmers and we promoted them as the stars that they were.

Once you have a reputation for producing great games from some of the best programmers around, you start to attract more talent and a virtuous circle is created, which helped to keep us at the cutting edge throughout the 8-bit era.

> "We were able to establish a reputation for great games from the beginning… and we promoted our programmers as the superstars that they were"
> Andrew Hewson

**Was discovering Graftgold a blessing?**
Absolutely. I don't think we were the only publishers Steve Turner approached initially, but fortunately we were the one he chose to go with. It was my brother Gordon who first brought Steve's game, *3D Space Wars*, to my attention. It instantly stood out from the rest of the games we were receiving and it was clear that this was from somebody who knew what he was doing. The game was technically superb and, most impressively of all, it was a complete, polished product that was pretty much ready to go straight to market.

Ultimately, Steve went on the produce some of our greatest games and also brought Andrew Braybrook into the fold, who was probably the most creative programmer of them all. Andrew could produce completely original works as if from nowhere and of course came up with *Uridium*, which was the biggest hit we ever had.

## SELECTED TIMELINE

**GAMES & BOOKS**

- **Hints & Tips for the ZX80** [Book] 1980
- **Space Intruders** [ZX81] 1981
- **Pilot** [ZX81] 1982
- **3D Space Wars** [ZX Spectrum] 1983
- **Technician Ted** [Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum] 1984
- **Paradroid** [C64] 1985
- **Southern Belle** [C64, ZX Spectrum] 1985
- **Uridium** [C64] 1986
- **Quazatron** [ZX Spectrum] 1986
- **Firelord** [C64, ZX Spectrum] 1986
- **Nebulus** [Various] 1987
- **Zynaps** [Various] 1987
- **Cybernoid** [Various] 1988
- **Stormlord** [Various] 1988
- **Onslaught** [Amiga, ST, Megadrive] 1989
- **Future Basketball** [Amiga, ST] 1990
- **Paradroid 90** [Amiga, ST] 1990
- **Moonfall** [Various] 1991
- **Pinball Dreams** [Various] 1992
- **Pinball Fantasies** [Various] 1994
- **Total Pinball 3D** [DOS] 1996
- **Hints & Tips for Videogame Pioneers** [Book] TBC 2015

**Which games did you enjoy playing yourself?**
I completed *Avalon* from start to finish and I really liked *Dilithium Lift* as well. Outside of our own titles I remember that it was *3D Monster Maze* on the ZX80 that first captured my imagination. However, I think I became a bit too 'close' to the games and somehow that dilutes their appeal. I remember talking to David Cooke, who co-wrote *Technician Ted* with Steve Marsden, and I asked him how he felt about leaving his mainstream software engineering job to become a games programmer. He simply replied 'its fine, but I've lost my hobby', so there is an element of seeing behind the curtain and somehow you lose the sense of wonder that you have as a player.

I also think that the games were too difficult for me! I could never get beyond level three in *Uridium*. I used to think it was just me that was useless but people tell me today how tough our games were and looking back on it I realise that our programmers were creating games for people like themselves – the fanatical gamers rather than mere mortals like me. When Andrew Braybrook wrote *Alleykat* he specifically set out to make a game to beat Julian Rignall, so what chance did I have?

As an industry we were all emulating the arcade where games are designed to be difficult so players put more money in the slot. It took a long, long time for developers to shake off the arcade influence and consider a different approach.

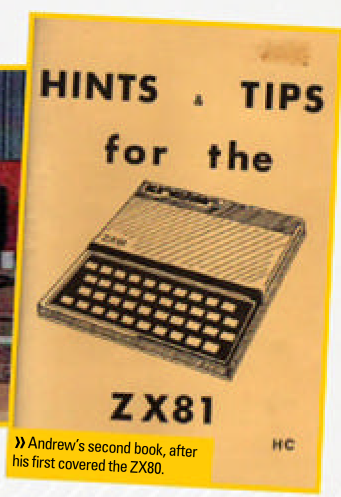
**Did you have much input into the games?**
It varied. Programmers such as Mike Male, Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook would produce complete games that required no feedback whatsoever. They maintained total ownership of the vision of their games. Then there were occasions where I had quite a lot of influence. With *Nebulus*, John Phillips had created what was essentially a tech-demo and we thrashed out the basic design together when I went to visit him at his home in Devon. The story of that day is in the book.

We also had an in-house team developing titles like *Zynaps*, so we had more influence over those. I read in **Retro Gamer** that Raffaele Cecco remembers me coming up with the name *Exolon*, I can't remember that to be completely honest but I am happy to take his word!

**Hewson's games had fantastic covers – what was the process for creating them?**
Again, it would never occur to me to put anything out on the market which I didn't think was high quality. In the early days you used to see quite a lot of shoddy, homemade looking covers and that always struck me as bizarre. I mean why bother if you're not going to do it properly? Airbrushed artwork was the new thing at the time, so we found



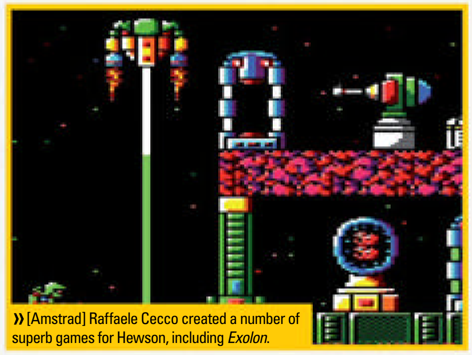
» The Hewson team (including Andrew, Bill, Janet and Gordon) stop work for a photo in 1984.

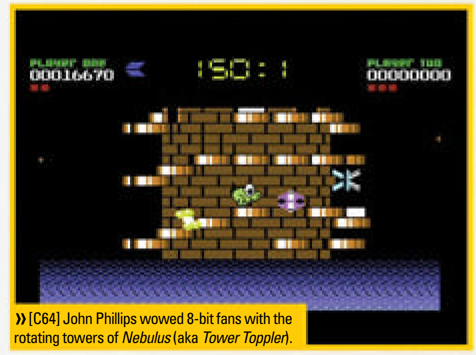



» Andrew's second book, after his first covered the ZX80.



[ZX Spectrum] Rafaelle Cecco did things bigger and better for the second *Cybernoid*.


[Amstrad] Raffaele Cecco created a number of superb games for Hewson, including *Exolon*.


[C64] John Phillips wowed 8-bit fans with the rotating towers of *Nebulus* (aka *Tower Toppler*).

local artists and took pre-release versions of the games along to them to help inspire our discussions and agree on a concept. Over time we identified who the really good artists were and went back to them time and time again.

**Were there any late night 'crunches'?**
The one I remember most clearly is staying up all night to pack the *Uridium* cassettes and disks for shipping the next day. Everything had to be absolutely right, because we knew it was going to be UK number one, so staying up all night was my way of dealing with the pressure. Development is tough – a lot of publishers don't really understand just how tough it is. We would agree a production plan with our programmers but ultimately it's impossible to predict what problems are going to arise. Nevertheless you've got to make a stab at it.

**What were the computer shows and that whole 'scene' like back in the Eighties?**
At the start shows like the ZX Micro Fairs were really very amateur. They felt a bit like a car boot sale. We'd take a foldout table and sell direct to the public. In later years it became much, much bigger and brash.

The original Hewson logo designed by Andrew's wife, Janet.

Consumer shows were a lot of fun, because you were interacting directly with the consumers and I have always said that the consumers are the most important group of people in the industry.

However the trade-only shows provided the opportunity to get a lot more business done and we had our fair share of fun along the way. In later years when we started going along to shows like CES things became even bigger and noisier. I remember bumping into William Shatner and shaking him by the hand. He pretended not to know me.

**What was your relationship with the press like?**
Very good, I'd like to think. When you've got classy products the press are very much on your side. Fortunately we were able to establish a reputation for great games from the beginning and we also promoted our programmers as the superstars that they were, which played very well.

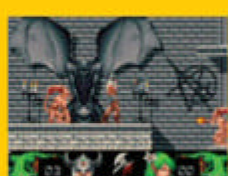
In fact some of the more enjoyable stories were from dealing with the press, like my naive attempt to feign indifference when Chris Anderson suggested the concept of what became the *ZZAP!64 Paradroid* diary over a pint in the pub. Another time I visited *C+VG* editor Tim Metcalfe at his home and left ecstatic an hour or two later after he asked to use the Uridium artwork for their front cover. I also treasure the memory I have of Julian Rignall's reaction when he saw *Nebulus* for the first time.

**Did you ever do any wacky press launches?**
We hired Didcot Railway Centre for *Southern Belle* and spent the day with the press chugging back and forth on the footplate of a steam engine. We launched *Dragontorc* at the London Museum, and for *Onslaught* we hired the dungeon at Warwick Castle. It was a great way of celebrating each release, promoting our programmers, and thanking everyone for their involvement with the games. Even today I hear of people like Steve Turner and Raffaele Cecco remarking about how good our PR was as a publisher and I do think it was a particular strength of ours.

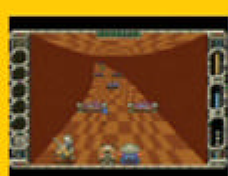
## FIVE TO PLAY Five lesser-known Hewson games you should try…



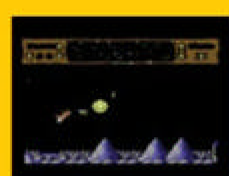
### 5TH GEAR 1988
■ Budget label Rack-It played host to this interesting title, which features a heavily-armed car that will remind many players of *Spy Hunter*. Over a series of vertically-scrolling courses, the player must travel up to the checkpoint and back down to the finish line – avoiding or shooting obstacles, enemy vehicles and trees.



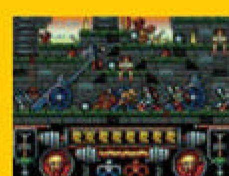
### DELIVERANCE: STORMLORD II 1990
■ Raffaele Cecco's *Stormlord* was a tough mixture of puzzles and platforms, with the dwarf hero having to rescue fairies trapped in bottles. This time the fairies are falling from the sky in horizontally scrolling levels, and the dwarf must catch them before they fall to their untimely death.



### ELIMINATOR 1989
■ The hills and curves of *Eliminator* brought together elements of *Out Run* and *Space Harrier* in an early demonstration of 16-bit power. The fast-paced 16-bit game was converted to 8-bit, and on the C64 particularly it becomes a more thoughtful game of choosing the right route at a slower pace – but it is still a challenge to survive.



### INSECTS IN SPACE 1990
■ The *4th Dimension* featured four great titles, but for C64 owners the standout had to be Sensible Software's shoot-'em-up. Taking elements from *Defender* and *Stargate*, Saint Helen must save the babies of the Rhineland from the attacking alien insects, which will pick up the babies and drop them to their death.



### ONSLAUGHT 1989
■ Chris Hinsley and Nigel Brownjohn collaborated on a clever mix of strategy and arcade with some sumptuous and original graphics. Talismans and other powers can be earned by fighting a Mind Duel against the temple wizards, the dangerous plague and undead armies spread across the land.



Budget label RackIt had a string of great games, including *Battle Valley*.



*3D Space Wars*, Steve Turner's first game for Hewson.

# YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Visit www.retrogamer.net/forum to get involved and ask questions

**crusto: Which 8-bit system did you enjoy working with most?**

I had fun with the ZX80 and more particularly the ZX81, but they were both soon superseded. I liked the simplicity of the ZX Spectrum but enjoyed the greater sophistication of the C64. I always felt the Amstrad CPC was a bit soulless. The BBC machine annoyed me in a vague sort of way because I felt the dead hand of television moguls hovering behind it.

**Doddsy: Why do you think the UK had the best developers?**

The fact that English is our native language made it easier for our developers than for non-native English speakers. We also have an entrepreneurial engineering tradition that perhaps our teenagers hooked into. The ZX80/ZX81/ZX Spectrum made the technology affordable and gave us a head start.

**sirclive1: Please can I spend a few hours learning Z80 with you? I'll bring coffee and snacks.**

After 35 years I'm afraid my Z80 knowledge has probably faded somewhat, so I'm not sure I'd be a very good teacher any longer. Steve Turner used to be able to write Z80 code directly in hex. I wonder if he still can? I've got a copy of *Hints & Tips* for the ZX81 at home. When I flick through I find it rather extraordinary that I wrote all of that and understood what all that code meant when I wrote it!

**Northway: Did you see any 'monkey business' during your time at Hewson?**

There were rumours of retail buyers being bribed with microwave ovens but it all passed me by. I daresay that sort of thing happened but I'm too green to have known about it.

**Hewson regularly put out compilations – were these good sellers, and how did you pick the games included in them?**

Piracy was absolutely rampant in the industry and as time goes on you learn that you need to find ways to extend the profitability of your portfolio. Compilations were a good way of generating some additional income between the big releases and reworking the assets we had. Naturally we would look to our top selling and award-winning titles for the compilations and identify a theme to connect them together. That might be something as simple as a compilation of our biggest hits, a Christmas compilation, or packaging games together of a similar genre.

**How did the Rack-It label come about exactly?**

Other publishers had budget ranges before us but without naming names, the quality was a bit poor, certainly in the early days. It just seemed like a weird business strategy to me, like walking into a butcher's shop and seeing a section for the quality meat and another for the slightly dodgy meat. I understood where the content was coming from but the majority of the games we received were not good enough to put out.

As the years went on expertise spread and the proportion of quality products we were receiving was much higher. We realised that the opportunity had come to join the budget market without corrupting our main sales and without compromising our belief in only releasing quality products.



» The beautiful blue cover art of *Nebulus*.

**Was it difficult to close down Hewson?**

It is one of the most painful periods of my life. Development costs had been rising and it was becoming clear that they were only going to continue rising. We'd had a difficult period financially but just when we were clawing our way out of trouble our German distributor hit us with a bombshell. They were going bust and couldn't pay our invoices. Given that Germany was always our best market this was the worst news imaginable. I decided that legally we had to cease trading and I had to live with the consequences. So that's what we did.

**Who came up with the name and logo for 21st Century Entertainment?**

The name was me, and I'm rather proud of it. I believed then and I still believe now that games are the artform of the 21st Century, so that name was really a statement of intent. This is the new artform and it's going to last a hundred years.

The original logo was a winged griffin. At the time I was very taken with the owl on the Psygnosis logo and also, believe or not, the humming bird used by the builders French Kier (which is now defunct). I believed then and I still do that birds, animals and people work well on logos because they look at you and you can't help but look right back at them. However the griffin was not universally popular and in many ways it didn't sit well with game artwork, so we dropped it.

**The *Pinball* series was rather important – how did you get to publish them?**

It was a stroke of luck, really, but when you are in business you work very hard to earn the luck that comes your way. We needed to get out and find new products having worked the old Hewson back catalogue. We found this four-man student team who had snuck into a show in London with their *Pinball* demo. It looked brilliant so I just said, 'right, sign them up!' I actually refused to let myself believe that *Pinball Dreams* was going to be a hit, despite what everybody around me was saying to me, because the year before I had been through a rather intense emotional rollercoaster and I definitely did not want to get my hopes up agan.



» [C64] Andrew Braybrook's classic *Paradroid* was followed by *Uridium*.



» Andrew meeting fans at the 2014 Revival event after his presentation.

After the success of *Dreams* the DICE guys wanted to rewrite their ball physics engine from scratch, but I convinced them to hold off and focus on a sequel. We both had a massive opportunity to capitalise on the success. I told them we just needed four new tables with about three extra features for the back of the game box, so that's what they did. *Pinball Fantasies* came out later that year. It was a bigger hit than *Dreams* and by then I was firmly focussed on creating and occupying the *Pinball* 'niche'. We could take ownership of it as a way of combating the ever rising costs of development.




» [Amiga 1200] The Partyland table from *Pinball Fantasies* in colourful AGA mode.

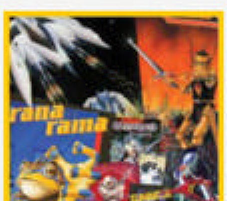
Fancy owning the soundtrack for Hints & Tips For Videogame Pioneers? Head to hewsonconsultants.bandcamp.com and use the code **retrogamer** to receive a 40% discount

**Your son Rob chose to go into the games industry – did you encourage him?**
No not at all except, I suppose, by accident. He worked on and off in his school holidays as a game tester and so he got some early experience in the business but I never made an effort to draw him into it.

**Was your wider family always involved in your work?**
I came from a nerdy family of scientists – my parents met when they worked in the same laboratory in 1944 developing phosphors for use with radar screens. My father, Bill, became an expert in manufacturing cathode ray tubes – key components of televisions and computer monitors – and patented several techniques. When he was coming up to retirement I brought him into the business to run our cassette duplication plant, because I knew he'd be good at it. My brother was also involved in the early days and my wife worked with me throughout. She typed up my first ZX80 book, designed the original Hewson Consultants logo and looked after the accounts.

**Who were the people behind the scenes that helped you the most?**
The programmers obviously because without them I'd just be a chap who wrote and published a few books. The people who helped me form 21st Century Entertainment certainly came to me in my hour of need. They were people that I knew locally and at an important moment they had more faith in me than I think I had in myself.

**What prompted the creation of a book on Hewson's history?**
My son, Robert, nagged, bullied, cajoled, begged and flattered me until I finally gave in and agreed.



» The soundtrack CD accompanying the book will be available to buy from www.hewsonconsultants.com.

**Were you surprised by the absolutely huge Kickstarter support?**
Surprised *and* flattered. It made me realise that in the Eighties while I was excited by the computers and what they could do, there seems to have been many more people who were excited by what we were up to. I never thought about it at the time but we seemed to have had quite the big impact on some peoples' lives.

**Were you aware of the retro scene?**
Only vaguely. However in promoting the Kickstarter I gave talks at Play Expo in Manchester and at Revival in Wolverhampton, and the level of passion and knowledge was really rather staggering. It never would have occurred to me back in the Eighties that people would be so enthusiastic about our games, thirty-odd years later.

**Was it fun to work with the composers and performers for the soundtrack CD?**
It started as a Kickstarter perk, but the artists involved have done such an incredible job that it developed into a full-length album. As a result we've had lots of people contacting us who missed the Kickstarter asking for a public release, so it's great that we've been able to deliver that.

The music and sound effects carry a great deal of the emotional content of a game so we always made sure we worked with really talented musicians. Having the likes of Ben Daglish, Jeroen Tel, Matt Gray and Steve Turner on the album is a privilege. They've all been so supportive and generous with their time.

**Have you tracked downed everyone you wanted to talk to for the book?**
There are a couple of people we would really have liked to have interviewed who weren't too keen, so obviously we've got to respect that, but we've got over twenty key figures interviewed inside and their perspective is invaluable for putting the whole story into its proper context.

> "It never would have occurred to me… that people would be so enthusiastic about our games, thirty-odd years later"
> Andrew Hewson

**Have you ever thought about licensing or recreating some of the classic Hewson titles?**
I get asked this a lot. The answer is no, because the world moves on. In the old days I always believed in delivering new, exciting experiences and showing the audience something they had never seen before. I'm no different now. The past has gone. Let's get on and do something new and interesting with the here and now. I'm happy to look back fondly at our old titles but let's not kid ourselves. They were games of their time. Now, we can do so much better.




» A sneak preview of the book looking back at 35 years of Hewson.

**What do you think is the future for the games industry?**
You can already see that games and movies are swapping technologies back and forth. I think the buzz surrounding VR is very exciting, and more than anything I'm delighted to see the return of open platforms – the period from the late Nineties when the consoles locked everything out.

I believe that all creativity comes from technological development, whether it's the printing press or films – first you get the technology and then an explosion of creativity follows. The games industry is the most exciting and important artform of the 21st century because it amplifies this truth about artistic expression. The prospects for videogame pioneers are more exciting than ever.




# Wheelie

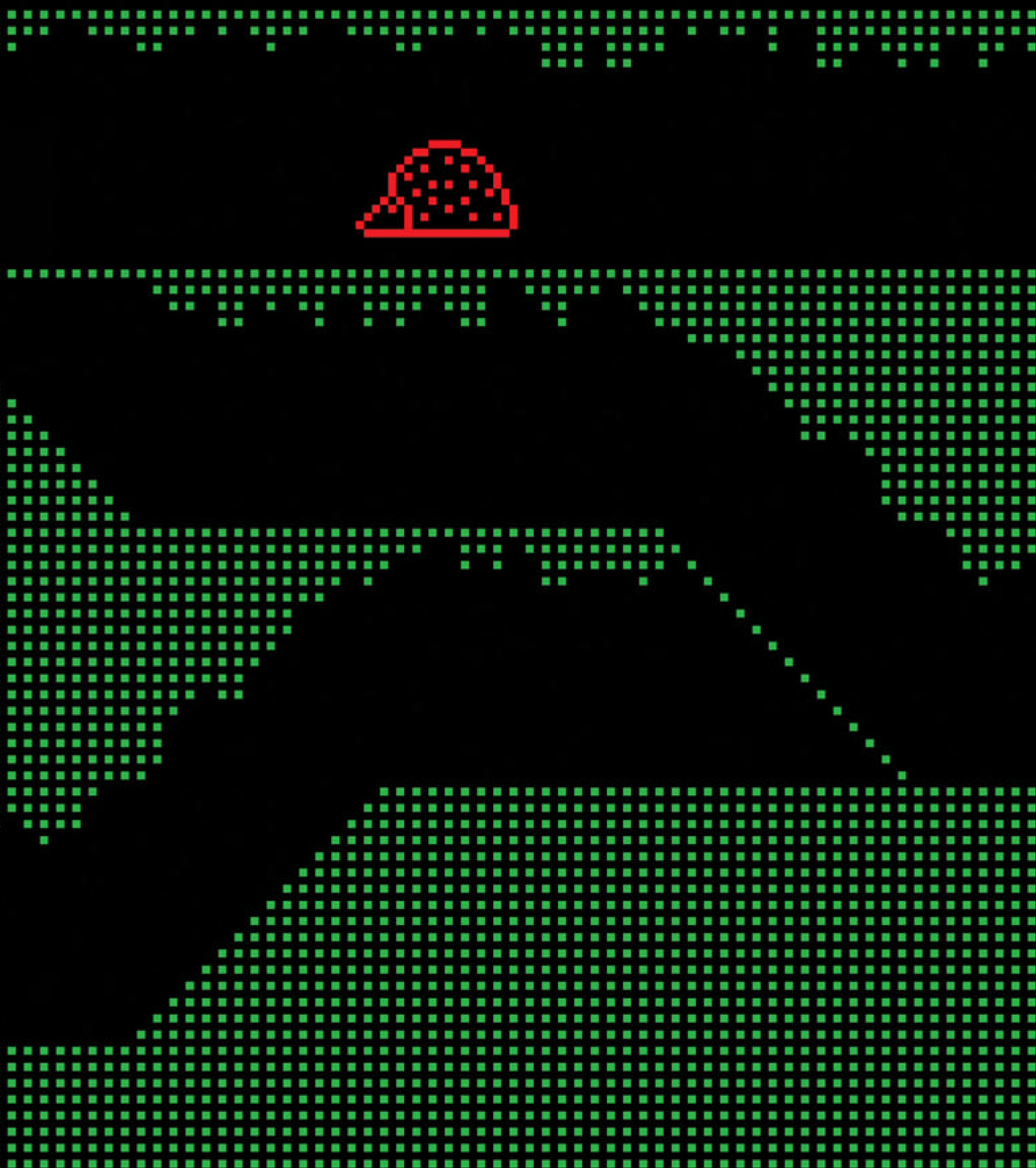
## THE HUNTER HAS BECOME THE HUNTED

RETROREVIVAL

» ZX SPECTRUM
» MICROSPHERE
» 1983

**After playing *Wheelie* for a bit, I can't help but think that I've gone a bit soft over the years.** It's an unusual platform game, in that it's set on a motorbike and handles as such. If you want to go up a slope, you'll need to ensure that you have enough momentum to do so, a routine that will surely be familiar to the millions of *Sonic* fans out there. But while in other games crossing an icy patch just means you'll slide around for a bit, in *Wheelie* you'll lose control and crash. Your speed must also be strictly regulated in order to descend slopes and cross gaps. Despite the fact that I grew up playing platform games, *Wheelie* is the kind of game that causes me to fail at apparently easy tasks.

*Wheelie*'s not a bad game at all, but the most memorable bit of it for me is arguably the worst part on a personal level. As you might have guessed from the reference above, my years of experience with platform games include a lot of time spent commanding a hedgehog to jump on enemies. In *Wheelie*, the first stage is spent trying to avoid having hedgehogs jump on you, which for most players is a relatively cutesy set of obstacles to overcome. But for me, being squashed by a hedgehog is a surreal, nightmarish inversion of the natural laws of videogaming. So that's *Wheelie*: a game that I like, but one that has instilled fear and respect into me.



# THE BOUNCING HEDGEHOGS

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## retro GAMER

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**Darran Jones**
Editor

At **Retro Gamer** we've always been proud of our scoring system, but we wanted to create something that would be just as relevant to you, the reader. We now have that system. As of this issue, **Retro Gamer's** reviews will be using the new scoring network, Just A Score. Don't worry: the scores found over the following pages will remain our own and they still come from the same trustworthy and reputable source. But now with the free Just A Score app, for the first time ever, you can follow our scores, like them, and submit your own scores for us and others to like. It's a fantastic new system that will enable you to tell us exactly what you like and will hopefully allow you to know what your fellow **Retro Gamer** readers enjoy. Let's do everything we can to ensure that *Strider* gets a perfect ten!




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» The team are discussing what score they should give Nintendo's Robotic Operating Buddy. It's not high…

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## retro GAMER PICK OF THE SCORES…



### Mario Kart power-ups

You can score absolutely anything on Just A Score. Our favourite this month has been rating the best and worst weapons from the Mario Kart series

- **10** RetroGamer_Mag scored **10** for Star (Super Mario Kart)
- **9** RetroGamer_Mag scored **9** for Red Shell (Super Mario Kart)
- **7** RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for Green Shell (Super Mario Kart)
- **5** RetroGamer_Mag scored **5** for Banana Skin (Super Mario Kart)
- **4** RetroGamer_Mag scored **4** for Bullet Bill (Super Mario Kart DS)
- **1.0** RetroGamer_Mag scored **1** for Blue Shell (Mario Kart 64)



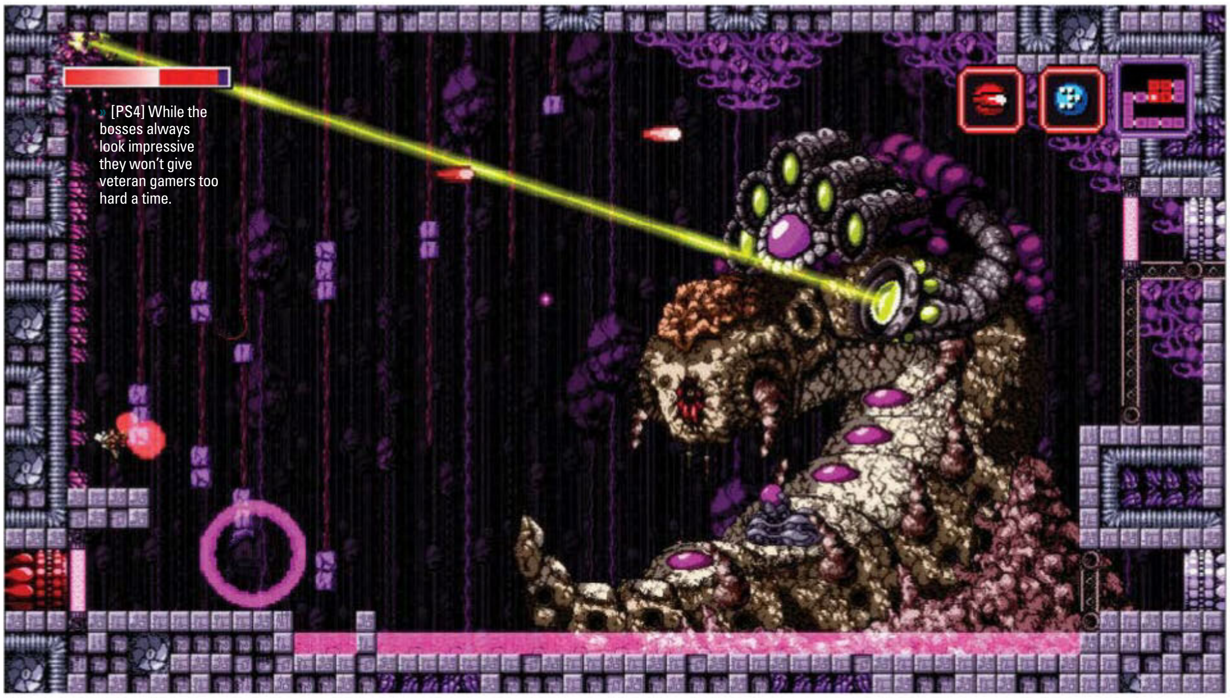

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# RETRORATED



>> This month we've lost ourselves in the rather wonderful Axiom Verge, a Metroid clone with plenty of fresh ideas. We also perform lots of gruesome fatalities in the latest Mortal Kombat game



» [PS4] While the bosses always look impressive they won't give veteran gamers too hard a time.

# Axiom Verge

## METROID IN ALL BUT NAME

### INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS4
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £14.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** THOMAS HAPP GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** THOMAS HAPP
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



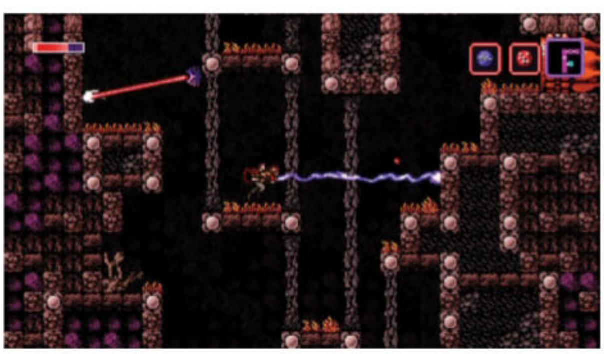
**If Nintendo ever decide to make a new 2D *Metroid* game it would be wise to get in touch with Thomas Happ. The** talented engineer who had previously worked at Petrolglyph Games has been working on *Axiom Verge* in his spare time for five years and has created an epic adventure that constantly manages to astonish due to its sheer creativity.

At its core, *Axiom Verge* is a love letter to the classic 2D *Metroid* games of old. It is a game that rewards weapon experimentation and environment exploration. As the game continues, it reveals itself to be something far more grander, and while it sometimes overreaches itself, it remains an amazingly entertaining and atmospheric adventure that constantly makes you challenge the gaming world that you have been thrown into.

It wouldn't be right to spoil *Axiom Verge*'s story, so we'll instead mention that it focuses on a scientist called Trace who wakes up in a strange foreign world after suffering a massive injury. The world instantly reminds you of *Metroid* due to its gloomy colour palette and beautifully defined pixel artwork. As the adventure progresses the *Metroid* vibe continues, but it begins to develop its own distinct personality, delivering an aesthetic experience that sets it apart from virtually every other PS4 game we've played. It sounds incredible, too, with a glorious brooding soundtrack that perfectly complements the on-screen antics of Trace and helps amplify the loneliness you feel from exploring the cleverly designed locations.

*Axiom Verge* never handholds you and some will find this immensely irritating. There are no waypoints, no clear indications of where to head to – you just look hard at the available maps and work out where the exploration gaps are or hope your brain can register what locations could be unlocked by your latest weapon. Some will find this immensely irritating, but it's rather satisfying to just use your eyes and brains for a change and it greatly adds to the joy of finally uncovering a brand new area. It's a pity, then, that for all is

» [PS4] Trace kind of reminds us of David Tennant's portrayal of The Doctor in *Doctor Who*.





» [PS4]The game's art design is really lovely in places.

### BRIEF HISTORY

» Thomas Happ left his job at PetroGlyph Games to work full time on *Axiom Verge*. He's now fully committed to *Axiom Verge*, where he worked on every aspect of its design, including the incredibly creepy soundtrack.



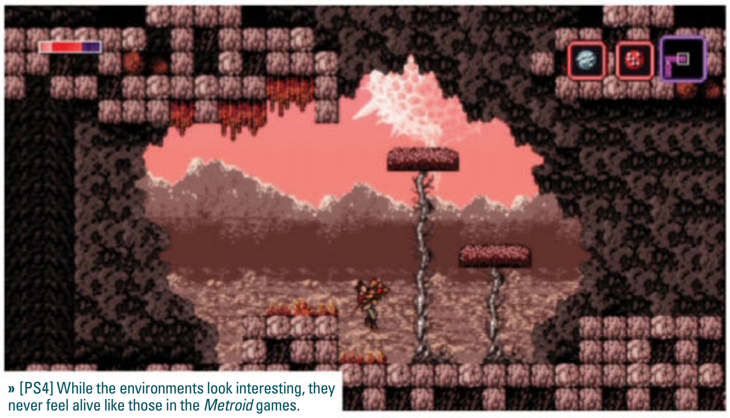
### PICKS OF THE MONTH



**DARRAN**
**Axiom Verge**
It might not be as good as Nintendo's *Metroid* games, but this is an great addition to the sub-genre.



**NICK**
**Mortal Kombat X**
A brutal brawler that might take liberties with its DLC, but still delivers plenty of grotesque fun.



» [PS4] While the environments look interesting, they never feel alive like those in the *Metroid* games.

pixel splendour and clever level design, *Axiom Verge* doesn't have much of an identity. There's a lovely organicness to *Super Metroid* for example that's sorely missing in Thomas' game.

What *Axiom Verge* does have, though, is some exceptional weapons that will help you make short work of the numerous enemies and bosses that Trace encounters. By far the most ingenious is the excellent Address Disruptor that can physically mess with the strange world Trace finds himself in. Initially you'll be using it to simply access new areas, but before long you realise that it can create platforms out of thin air, alter the structure of monsters and much more. It takes the idea of *Metroid*'s interacting with the environment to impressive new levels and highlights just how much effort Thomas has put into his game.

There are plenty of other weapons and items to discover in *Axiom Verge*, from teleportation suits to a cool flea-like drone that's great fun to use. In fact, there's so much heavy artillery in the game that it gives Thomas' game an almost *Contra*-like feel. The weapons don't always gel as well as we'd like them to, but the sheer amount of variety on offer ensures that you'll soon find a weapon you can feel comfortable with (until you need to use another to access a specific area or defeat a certain boss).

If *Axiom Verge*'s weapons sometime feel a little off, the same can also be said for the numerous boss fights you encounter. While each and every one is a graphical delight in terms of design and scale (they often look like 16-bit designs which juxtapose nicely with the 8-bit style of *Axiom*'s locations) they're not the most challenging of bosses, often reliance on perseverance rather than skill to beat. The attack patterns of many of them are relatively predictable to work out and they don't always challenge your latest weapon or item in the way a good *Metroid* game will. That's not to say they're disappointing, but they certainly lack a challenge, particularly when you consider how hard it can be to actually find them.

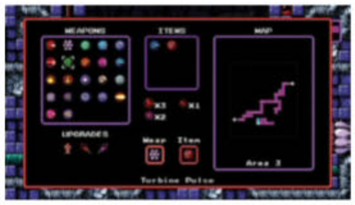
More satisfying is the checkpoint system *Axiom Verge* uses. While there are checkpoints hidden around the huge playing area, it also saves your position whenever you die. There's nothing worse than doing a large stretch of a exploration, only to make a fatal mistake and lose your progress and power-ups. *Axiom Verge* neatly sidesteps this issue and while it can sometimes be a slog to revisit a place due to the occasional poorly-placed checkpoint it is never more than a small niggle.

*Axiom Verge* is not only a fine tribute to *Metroid* and other similar games, but it constantly tries to push the template into new and unexplored areas. It doesn't always succeed, but it feels churlish to complain when you realise that everything, from the script to the game engine and music is the work of just one man. *Axiom Verge* may lack its own identity but it's certainly not short of new ideas and it proves that even if a genre is 30 years old it's still possible to teach it plenty of new tricks. *

## In a nutshell

**It lacks polish, but when it comes to sheer inventiveness and creativity, Thomas' labour of love is hard to beat. Let's just hope that the planned PS Vita release hits the market sooner rather than later.**

RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for
Axiom Verge
8
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [PS4] There are a large number of exotic weapons to collect and some of them are extremely well hidden.



» [PS4] Although most save stations are well placed, a few are in quite awkward locations.

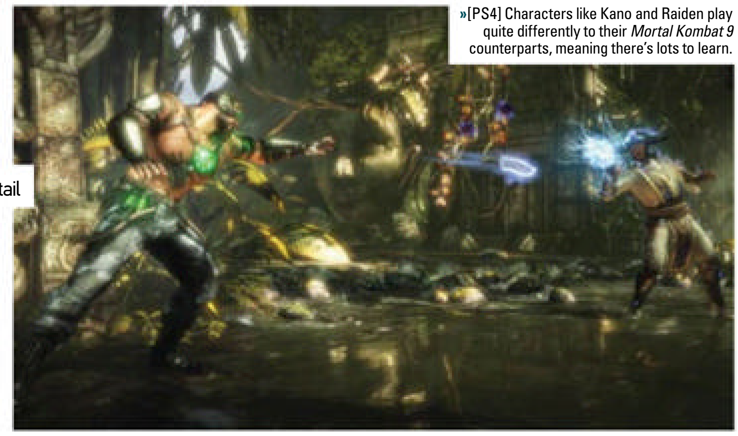
# RETROROUND-UP

» Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

## PICK OF THE MONTH

# Mortal Kombat X

**» System:** PS4 (tested) Xbox One, PC, PS3, Xbox 360 **» Cost:** £54.99 **» Buy it from:** Online and retail



»[PS4] Characters like Kano and Raiden play quite differently to their *Mortal Kombat 9* counterparts, meaning there's lots to learn.

**We're not big fans of DLC and sadly *Mortal Kombat* X has some of the worst in recent memory.** We don't want to pay full-price for a game, only to be taunted with an unavailable character on the actual character select screen (Goro, in case you're wondering) and we certainly don't spend large amounts of money on our games to have overly expensive characters available at the same time as the game's release. It's cheap, it's nasty and it needs to stop by gamers sending a message with their wallets. What makes the DLC for *Mortal Kombat X* even more annoying is that it genuinely doesn't need it.

Eight new characters have been added to the roster and they cater to a variety of playing styles. They're an interesting mix, but early highlights include the gunslinger Erron Black, Master Blaster-styled double act Ferra/Torr, the insect-like D'Vorah and Cassie Cage, who plays like a cross between her two parents (Sonya Blade and Johnny Cage). While the juggling of *Mortal Kombat 9* remains, there is more scope for having extended combos. Characters also have three variations, each with their own movesets, which greatly adds to *Mortal Kombat*'s longevity. Add in King Of The Hill, Test Your Luck, Living Towers and the always hilariously bad Story Mode and *Mortal Kombat X* reveals itself to have a huge amount of offline content.

This is handy because playing online does leave a lot to be desired at the moment. Many of our games were ruined by lag, while the ability to only be able to play games in your region seems like an oversight. The new online Faction Wars mode suffers as well due to the fact that we couldn't always connect.

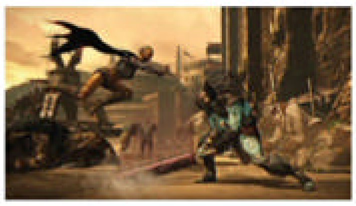
Play locally, however, and you'll find *Mortal Kombat X* to be something of a gory delight. The Fatalities are move over-the-top than ever, the available content is huge in scope while the gameplay is tight and responsive. The character roster needs a little tweaking, but this is a solid entry in the series that's mainly let down by annoying online issues.




»[PS4] The fatalities in *Mortal Kombat X* are extremely graphic and not for the faint-hearted.

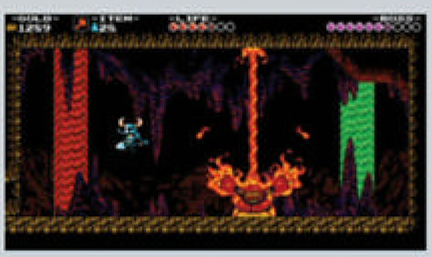


» [PS4] As you'd expect *Mortal Kombat X* has lots of moves that will upset your stomach and your opponents.



» [PS4] All levels are interactive, enabling you to use the environment to your advantage.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
Mortal Kombat X (PS4)
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

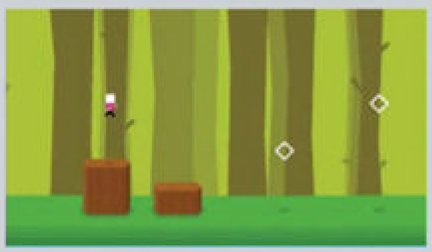


## Shovel Knight

**» System:** PS4 (tested) Xbox One, PC, Wii U
**» Buy it for:** £11.99
**» Buy it from:** PSN, Xbox Live, Wii Shop, Steam

We missed *Shovel Knight* when it was released on PC and Wii U, so it's great to see it resurface on PS4 and Xbox One. Effectively it's a cross between *Duck Tales*, *Mega Man* and *Super Mario Bros. 3*, complete with NES-styled visuals and a glorious chip tune soundtrack. Shovel Knight not only uses his trusty shovel as a weapon, but also uses it to pogo on enemies to kill them or reach otherwise inaccessible areas. Like many classic 8 and 16-bit platformers it's filled with secret areas and while the boss fights are tough, they are never impossible to beat. It's let down by some odd difficulty spikes, but this is an otherwise excellent platformer.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for
Shovel Knight
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

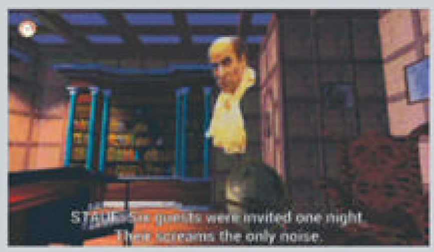


## Mr Jump

**» System:** iOS, Android **» Buy it for:** Free
**» Buy it from:** App Store, Google Play

If *Mr Jump* had a face we would punch it. Its creators have created a maddeningly annoying twist on *Flappy Bird*, which, we're shamed to admit, we can't stop playing. Effectively it's an endless runner with an emphasis on deviously placed jumps, and therein lies *Mr Jump*'s biggest problem. It requires tight precision like the 8-bit platformers of old, but the touchscreen struggles to keep up with your demands. As a result you'll often lose in *Mr Jump* because the system lets you down. It's flawed, sure, but we still find ourselves picking it up for another go. Mechanics are slowly introduced as play progresses, but you'll need amazing skills to reach the 12th and final level.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **5** for
Mr Jump
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE




## The 7th Guest

**» System:** Android (tested), iOS, PC **» Buy it for:** £4.89
**» Buy it from:** Google Play, App Store, Steam

Once heralded as the future of PC gaming, *The 7th Guest* has managed to find its way to mobile devices and may just have found its perfect home. The slow-paced puzzle gameplay works just as well on touchscreens as it did with a mouse, and the original creepy atmosphere survives and invokes a feeling of unease. What's more, it's clear that a lot of work has gone into the package as a variety of graphical filters and new voice acting have been included alongside the original assets, as well as extra features like deleted scenes. The game demands a premium price (and lots of space on your device, thanks to all the video) but fans will be satisfied by the package.

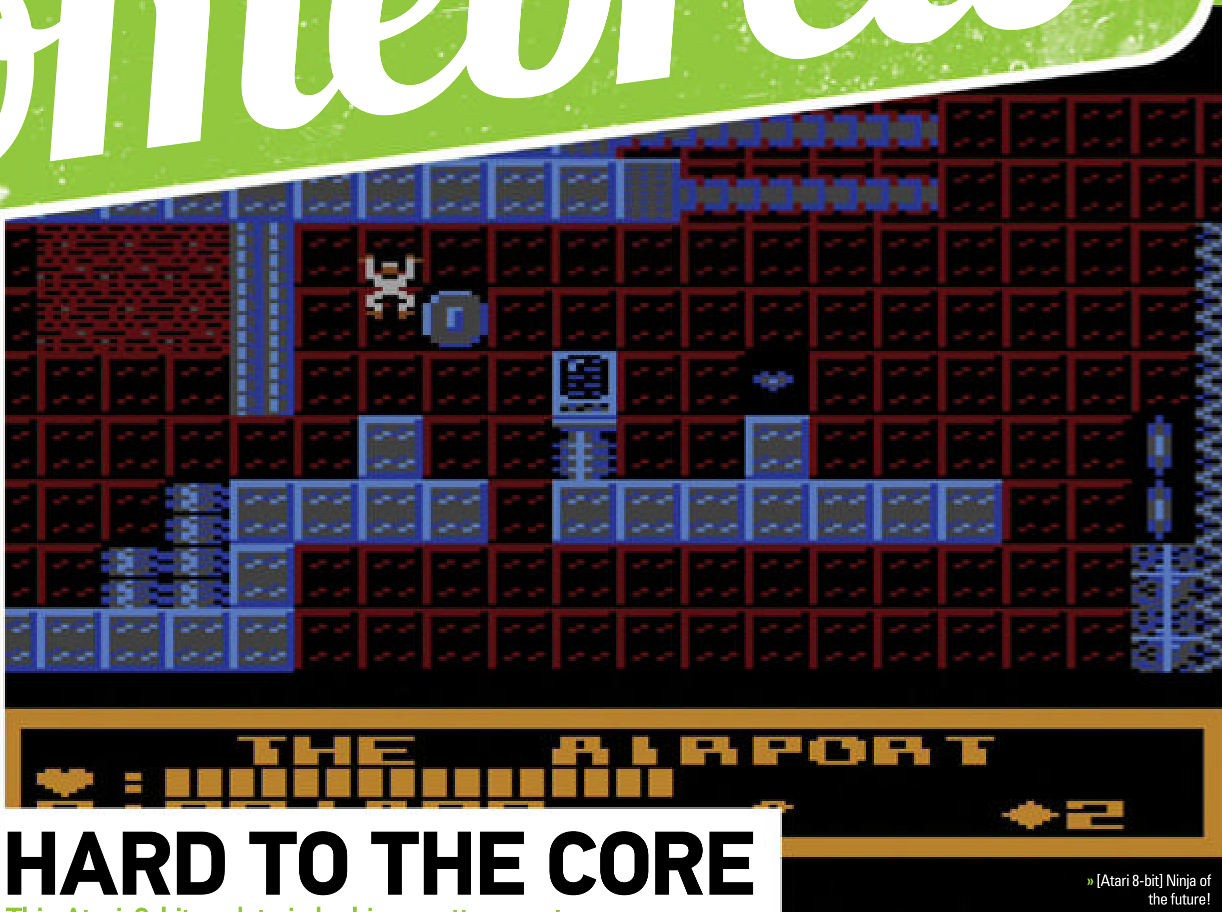
RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for
The 7th Guest
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

# Welcome to Homebrew



J.K

>> Shoot The Duck for the C16 is a simple but fun action game and was the first attempt at programming on the machine for developer Pedro Garcia, but what makes it unusual is that he is only sixteen. It's available from Plus/4 World behind Kikstart.eu/shoot-duck-264, and that page has a few interesting notes from Pedro about its creation




» [Atari 8-bit] Ninja of the future!

## HARD TO THE CORE

This Atari-8-bit update is looking pretty sweet

**Ke-Soft's *Tecno Ninja* for the Atari 8-bit is a platform-based flip screen action game where the titular character must lithely run and jump his way through a massive, labyrinthine complex.** The ninja has the ability to gracefully leap through the air in a way that normal humans can't, but stealth has completely gone out of the window for this particular mission, though. All of the anti-intruder defences, including electrified fences, security drones, automatically moving shutters and powerful laser beams have been activated so they'll definitely need to be avoided, too.

To progress through each of the ten levels he'll need to find keys that can open the doors which bar his way, hearts that can restore some health and other useful items, as well as finding the hidden paths; not all of these are important to the mission, but they may conceal useful items so it's worth searching. Planning ahead is a must as well because *Tecno Ninja* is also something of a puzzle game as well, and opening doors or punching the removable background blocks in the wrong order can potentially leave the player stuck with no way to continue.

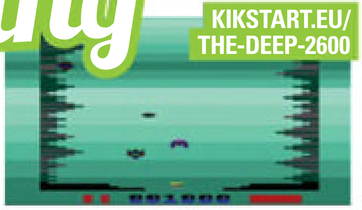
This isn't actually a new game but, since it turns 25 years old in 2015, the developer has taken it apart for its birthday, sprucing it up in order to celebrate. There is a free download of the game itself at the Atari Age forums behind Kikstart.eu/tecno-ninja-a8 – don't write protect the disk image or it won't work correctly – and there's also some information at the start of the thread on ordering a limited edition boxed copy which comes with a map. And if wading through a hundred screens as a ninja isn't enough of a challenge, programmer Kemal Ezcan has mentioned that there's going to be a sequel.

> "Planning ahead is a must as Tecno Ninja is something of a puzzle game"

## Incoming

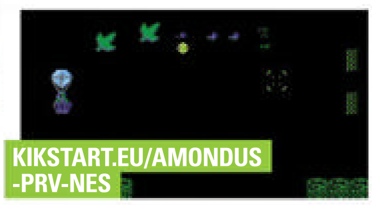
**The latest homebrew games that you should be excited for. We are liking how The Deep is shaping up**

KIKSTART.EU/THE-DEEP-2600



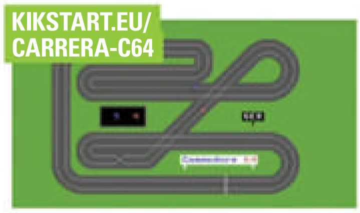
▲ Time for some sub-aquatic treasure hunting; *The Deep* is currently a playable work in progress for the Atari 2600.

▼ *The Rise Of Amondus* for the NES will be a scrolling shooter with collecting elements added to the gameplay.



KIKSTART.EU/AMONDUS-PRV-NES

KIKSTART.EU/CARRERA-C64



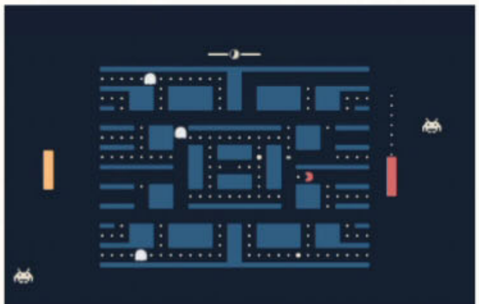
▲ Experience the thrills and spills of slot car racing on the C64 for one or two players with *Carrera F1.*

## REMIXED TO THE BEAT


» [C64] What do you expect for 10p?

**Another upgrade is** Genesis Project's *Ultima IV Remastered*, which takes the C64 version of the game and tears it apart in order to patch bugs and issues with the non-player dialogue, speed up some of the rendering, significantly improve the graphics for the character creation part of the game and spruce up the in-game tiles based on the set from *Ultima V*.

These mods were carried out by Per "MagerValp" Olofsson with Vanja "Mermaid" Utne providing new graphics and it can be downloaded from Kikstart.eu/u4-remastered-c64 as disk and cartridge images.

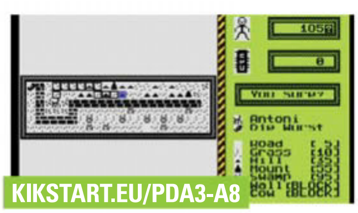

» [Windows] Wakka wakka pong?

## ALL FOR ONE

**What do you** get if you cross *Pong*, *Space Invaders and Pac-Man*? One possible result would be *Pacapong* where Pac-Man is sent back and forth through the maze by two player-controlled bats at either side to eat dots, ghosts when appropriate and the little invaders that appear and will spawn larger ones at the sides.

It could have been a complete mess, of course, but we have given it a quick play and cramming three already fast-moving games into one has resulted in something that is unsurprisingly manic but fun to play. Kikstart.eu/pacapong-win has downloads for Windows, Linux and OS X versions.

▼ Find the shortest route to the sausage in each stage of *Poor Dog Anthony 3* for the Atari 8-bit.



KIKSTART.EU/PDA3-A8

# Homebrew heroes



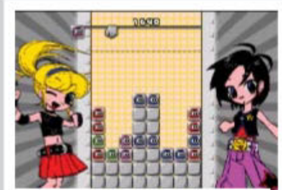
**Andrew Jeffreys is the man behind Repixel8.com and developer of a growing collection of 8-bit and 16-bit games, so we borrowed him for a quick natter about his most recent addition, the Mega Drive action puzzler, Doroppu**

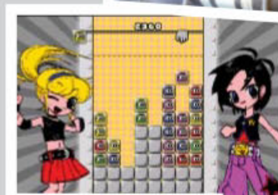
**Where did the initial idea for *Doroppu* come from?**
Having already produced a few games for the Atari 2600, I decided to try my hand at making games for the Mega Drive. The plan was to start with a relatively simple game, so I considered doing a *Tetris* clone. However I wanted to make it a bit different and thought it would be interesting to combine the concepts of *Puyo Puyo* and *Puzzle Bobble* to make a unique game.

**And how long does a game like *Doroppu* take to create?**
As with all projects, many times longer than I first imagined. I think it took just a few days to get the basic gameplay working, but when you add in all the extra stuff required to make a finished game, such as the title screen, high score table, two player mode, music and the like, it soon adds up to many weeks.

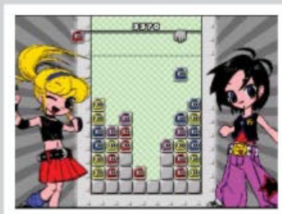
**Your website mentions that it's written with BasiEgaXorz, what is that?**
Well essentially BasiEgaXorz is a BASIC editor and compiler running under Windows for developing games for the Mega Drive. Unlike many versions of BASIC which are interpreted and as a result pretty slow, BasiEgaXorz compiles down to machine code meaning it runs very fast. In addition, its creator, Joseph Norman, has produced companion tools for designing sprites, tiles and graphics. It hasn't been updated in years, and the language does have a few quirks, but there are active forums and this is certainly the easiest way to develop games for Sega's 16-bit console.

**Is there anything you would have done differently?**
One thing that I would like to have done is to have made


» [Mega Drive] Keeping things under control.

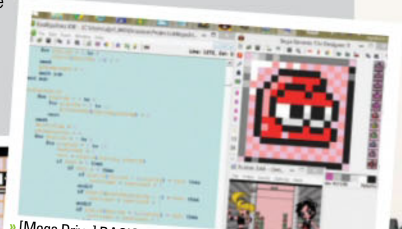

» [Mega Drive] Arms will cover you.

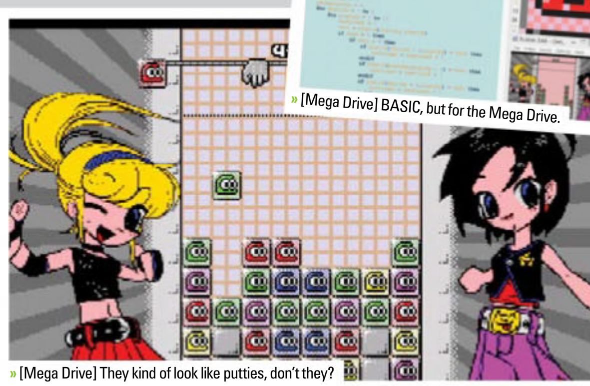
better use of the system's graphical capabilities. The Mega Drive allows up to a decent 64 colours on the screen, but I had only used 16 colours for the game's graphics which gives it that NES-like appearance.



**What feedback have you received from players so far?**
I've been pretty surprised with the amount of positive feedback so far considering the games relative simplicity. The two player mode seems to be going down very well, so I'm glad I decided add that in the end. The most common question I get asked is regarding if and when it will be released on a physical cartridge. This is something I'm currently looking into and hope to have news fairly soon.

**And finally, can you tell us what games you are currently working on?**
Yes. I'm currently working on a much more adventurous platform game for the Mega Drive. Also written in BasiEgaXorz, this features parallax scrolling, and all the usual stuff you'd expect from a 16-bit platformer. Another game, *Flype*, which is a ZX Spectrum puzzle platformer inspired by *Cool Croc Twins* is currently in the testing phase. This will be released as a download and also on iOS devices via the app store using emulation. Finally I have a few other 2600 and Speccy games in various stages development, keep an eye on Repixel8.com for the latest on these.


» [Mega Drive] BASIC, but for the Mega Drive.


» [Mega Drive] They kind of look like putties, don't they?

# BRUCE LEE 2

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** JONAS HULTÉN
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BRUCE-2-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

**The sister of the legendary martial artist and film star, Bruce Lee, has been kidnapped by the sinister Tao-Bao who has locked her in a dungeon deep within his palace.** The evil overlord also has the backing of a small army of hired mercenaries consisting of celebrities including Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Chuck Norris, all of who have been drafted in to deal with Lee when he comes knocking. In order to reach his sibling Bruce will need to fight them while collecting lanterns and pulling levers which in turn change the environment, opening new routes further into the stronghold.

Regular readers of **Retro Gamer** might find this description or the in-game graphics familiar and that's because *Bruce Lee 2* on the C64 is actually a 'demake' of Bruno R. Marcos' unofficial Windows sequel to the 1984 Datasoft classic which we previously covered back in issue 120. This conversion was carried out by Jonas Hultén - whose previous release, with his brother Patric, was the enjoyable gallery blaster *Cosmos* – and according to the developer it was a challenging job to take the C64-styled graphics and retool them to work with the real hardware, requiring nearly a year to complete.

As with the Windows version of the game, Bruce has his work cut out. Along with Tao-Bao's Hollywood muscle and some other martial artists to contend with – they can be knocked down and will disappear after a couple hits – there are spike pits, submerged areas, and electrified hazards standing between our hero and his poor kidnapped sister.

We missed being able to clock up a score as we knocked the stuffing out of Chuck and Kareem while exploring – this is carried over from the Windows version – but *Bruce Lee 2* is a very solid game that could happily pass as an official sequel. Fans of the original and those who enjoy some challenging platform-based action should definitely give this conversion a go. For the less skilled players it offers an infinite lives option and the Easy mode which extends a couple of the platforms to make the tricky jumps more accessible.

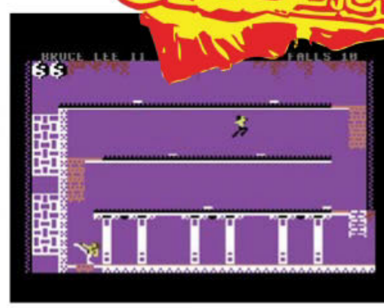
9
RetroGamer_Mag scored **9** for
Bruce Lee 2 (C64)
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [C64] This jump needs expert timing.

retro GAMER SIZZLER


» [C64] Being a celebrity can be painful.

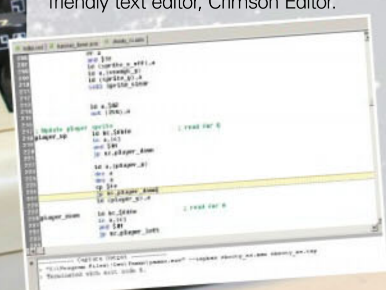

» [C64] Help, it's Chuck Norris!

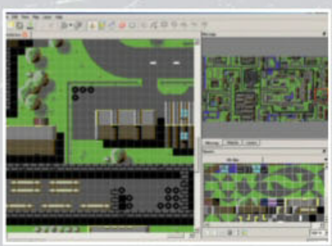
# Make this

**Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: selecting tools**

NEW

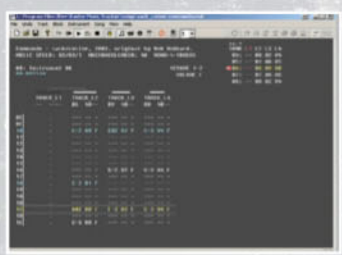
**1** It's important to choose utilities that are comfortable to use; for example, Integrated Development Environments come in all shapes and sizes, some platform specific and loaded with features and others more general purpose like the programmer-friendly text editor, Crimson Editor.

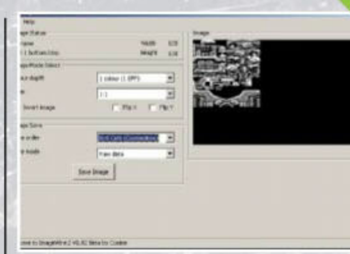




**2** Then there are graphics; these divide into categories like character or bitmap editing and most of the programs are specific to a platform, but more general purpose tools can be 'persuaded' to work for 8-bit and 16-bit development, too.

**3** Music editors tend to be a lot more specific and Raster Music Tracker – shown below – was designed with the Atari 8-bit in mind while tools like GoatTracker are C64 specific. Arkos Tracker works for the MSX and Amstrad CPC.





**4** Of course there won't always be a tool for your chosen platform or written to do exactly what you need, but there's always an option of building your own. It doesn't even need to be 'user friendly' unless you plan to release it publicly!

## ROBOTS

» **FORMAT:** CP/M 80 AND CP/M 86 » **DEVELOPER:** FLOPPY SOFTWARE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ROBOTS-CPM » **PRICE:** FREE

**The machine uprising has begun and robots all over the planet have reprogrammed themselves with just one goal in mind: the total extermination of humanity.** It’s like no one learned anything from watching the *Terminator* films! But that single-mindedness is also a weakness to be exploited because the robots are so focused on stamping people out that they’re oblivious to their surroundings and can be led into collisions with each other, debris or the terrain. They’re also motion sensitive, so they will hold still if their quarry does.

This is a CP/M version of the BSD Unix game *Robots*, which is a turn-based affair so the player moves in one of eight directions or teleports randomly with the Teletran device and the robots then react to their new target position accordingly. It is somewhat lacking in the presentation but this is still an entertaining little game.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for Robots (CP/M 80/86)
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE




» [CP/M] Well that life didn’t last long…

## KNIGHTMARE

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS, OSX AND LINUX » **DEVELOPER:** DEMON VIDEOGAMES
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/KNIGHTMARE-WIN » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Windows] Conquerors of the sky.

**Popolon the knight’s home town has been ransacked and his beloved Aphrodite taken away to Demon Castle and, since our hero is a remarkably brave and currently angry warrior, he only pauses to pick up his trusty bow and quiver before marching resolutely out towards peril.** The levels are packed with demons to be slain or avoided and each stage has a large guardian blocking Popolon’s path.

This is a remake of the MSX game which is a fixed speed scrolling shooter, sporting reworked cartoon-like graphics and smooth scrolling that replaces the choppier movement of the original. It’s a tough game and even experienced players may struggle at first, but utilising the power-ups and finding a primary weapon that works for you opens *Knightmare* right up.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for Knightmare (Windows)
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

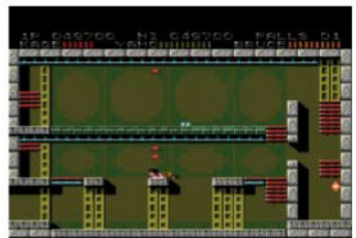
> “There are power-ups available from floating icons and shootable tiles”

## BRUCE LEE

» **FORMAT:** SEGA MASTER SYSTEM » **DEVELOPER:** KAGESAN
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BRUCE-LEE-SMS » **PRICE:** FREE

**That Bruce Lee, he gets everywhere, especially in this spread! And now here is a conversion of his original quest to discover the secret of immortality has been released for the Sega Master System.**

All of the other elements are present, as well as elements like the lanterns Bruce collects to unlock doorways. There are also devices which will eviscerate *everybody.* The graphics have been reworked to take advantage of the Master System, with the backgrounds and sprites looking excellent. There’s a lot of fun to be had with this along the way while working out the timing to pass some of the hazards and kicking the bad guys into harm’s way.



» [Master System] Right over his head.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for Bruce Lee (Master System)
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

## SHOOT THE UFO 2015

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 7800 » **DEVELOPER:** SIO2
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SHOOT-UFO-7800 » **PRICE:** FREE

**Gallery shooter *Shoot The UFO* looks and, to a degree, feels a little like the Intellivision game, *Astrosmash*, with the player’s craft sat at the bottom of the screen and blasting upwards towards the UFOs which patrol the upper area of the screen.** But although all of the falling rocks can destroy the ship, only the smaller ones can actually be blasted so dodging is a necessity.

The primary mission is to zap the flying saucer, extra points can be mined from the little asteroids so it helps to keep the fire button held down. Don’t expect anything astounding from *Shoot The UFO* because it’s simple but pick some music to listen to as you blast things and, it’s possible to get ‘into the zone’.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **6** for Shoot the UFO 2015 (Atari 7800)
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE




» [Atari 7800] It’s only rocks and rolling.

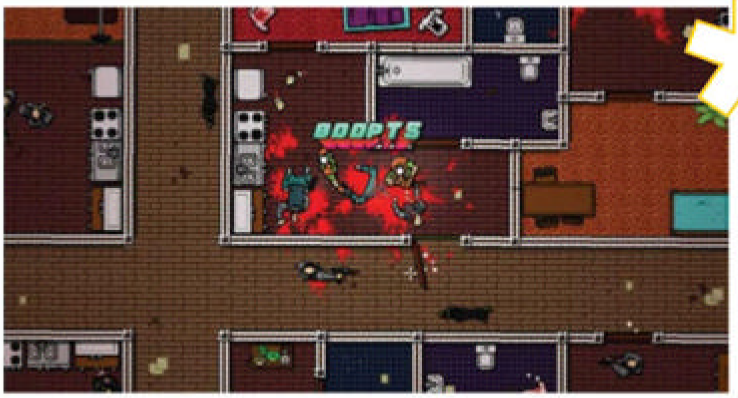
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## STAR LETTER

### EXPANDED MEMORY

Hi **Retro Gamer,**

A couple of weeks ago I was trying to put together my vote for your Greatest Games Of All Time feature, and was struggling to decide how to do it. Should I do the most technically advanced games, the most important, or simply the ones that meant the most to me? In the end, I went with the last option. However, that left me with some weird entries.

I used to play the SNES with my dad a lot when I was younger, and while we enjoyed games like *Super Mario World* and *Donkey Kong Country*, we also had a lot of fun with decidedly non-classic games like *Ballz 3D*. I know it's not brilliant and definitely doesn't have a chance of making the list, but I had so much fun playing 'Pass-The-Pad' with my dad and trying to beat that stupid jester that I couldn't exclude it. Sure, there are better designed games out there – but they don't make me smile as much when I think back to them, and that's what's important for me. A great game is more than just lines of code, it's a set of memories and stories that you'll reminisce over for years to come.

Mark Roseby

**We're with you there – and funnily enough, Nick's also got a weird affection for that game. It is undeniably pretty broken, but the Mega Drive version kept him entertained for a very long time and, apparently, it was the first thing he talked about with one of his friends. A great game is great no matter how you experience it, but experienced with the right people and at the right time, even a lesser one can turn into something special on a personal level – and looking at the votes, you are not the only one who thinks so.**



» [SNES] Mark's good memories of playing *Ballz 3D* trump the game's design issues.

### HARD TIMES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

First off, congratulations on a great mag. I have been getting the digital version for some time now and I always look forward to getting the new issue delivered to my tablet.

But the real reason of this letter is to the developers of new 'retro styled' games, like *Shovel Knight*, *Axiom Verge* and *Hotline Miami*. Can you please make them more accessible to the casual gamer (I mean easier) or at least have an easier difficulty option?

Now, I'm 49 this year and I have been playing games since *Pong* – had all types of consoles and handhelds, each time selling off one to get the latest. Now it's down to the Vita and 3DS. My Xbox 360 just collects dust.

I see these 'new retro styled games' (NRSG's – it might catch on) and think, "great… gotta try that when it's available." But then I read the reviews and just about every single time it will state that it's hard as hell. It turns me right off! I don't feel compelled to purchase them when I know that I will either end up wanting to snap my Vita in half or throw the 3DS against a brick wall yelling, "who's laughing now!" It will be turned off and never played again (well, actually, never say never).

So I figure, just add in a difficulty option that makes the game easier – just like they used to do in the good old days. You just might find more people will play your game. And yes, I know there were some right royal arsehole games back then, too. Anyway, back to the sunshine…

Rex Graham

**Glad to hear you're enjoying the magazine, Rex. Extreme difficulty is definitely a theme in today's retro inspired releases, and we can see why – old games were generally quite hard, and you can see the desire to create an authentic retro experience. It's also worth noting that the retro inspired games are often positioned as an alternative to mainstream releases, which have gradually softened in difficulty since the early Nineties.**

**However, we're now seeing a resurgence of hard games with modern sensibilities thanks to the likes of the *Souls* series, which has proven an appetite for difficult games amongst the non-retro audience. With that in mind, we agree with you – we certainly wouldn't mind a few more old-style games giving us a bit of a break.**




### TRASH TALK

Hello **Retro Gamer**,

I really enjoyed your article on the *Trashman* series in issue 140. It was interesting to see you outlining the DNA of the game in Ultimate's and Rare's subsequent game output, too (although developer details were omitted at the beginning of the article). With this influence in mind, was there any impact on Playground Games' *Forza Horizon* series, as when you hit a dustbin with a car you are awarded a 1000 score with a 'Trashman' notification?

I suppose being based in Leamington Spa/Warwickshire there's plenty of crossover between developers (Codemasters/Rare/Playground), but

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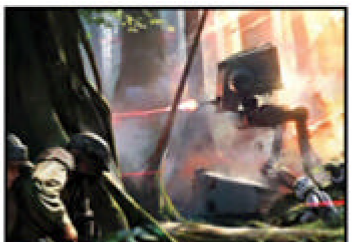
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do you know anything else about this, in terms of where its inspiration came from, or indeed if there is a link?

Alex Wade

**There's certainly some crossover between developers as the Playground Games team does contain a lot of ex-Codemasters staff. Unfortunately, we don't know for sure if *Forza Horizon* is specifically referencing *Trashman*, though, hopefully we'll find out one day. However, while the *Forza* series itself has just turned ten years old we'll hold off on doing a history piece for now – we get the feeling that angry readers would demand our heads!**



### DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

**Star Wars**

**Between the forthcoming *Battlefront* game and the new trailer for *Episode VII*, everyone's on the *Star Wars* hype train. That might be expected in an office where meeting rooms are named Hoth and Endor, but the enthusiasm is genuine – the words "I feel like a kid again," have been used a lot.**

## WE DON'T NEED ROADS

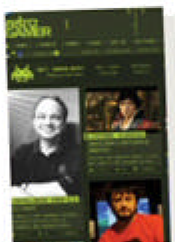
Hey there **Retro Gamer,**

I must say one of my favourite sections in the mag has been the Back To The Nineties and Eighties (RIP) sections. While I certainly wouldn't have played every game covered in those pages I certainly did collect gaming magazines at the time, and it's like being back in that time. It's also nice to know that over in the UK you had some rather 'interesting' top five songs back then!

I notice that we're now approaching the end of the Nineties so I was wondering if the series will be continuing once you hit Y2K. That time period would include consoles like the Dreamcast which is definitely treated as retro these days. What do you think? I obviously hope we continue to go back… back to the Noughties!

Tim Donovan

**As Back To The Nineties isn't scheduled to end for over a year at this point, we haven't come up with any solid plans for what to do just yet. Readers: how do you feel about revisiting a time when Sonique and Craig David were chart-toppers, *Gladiator* and *X-Men* were box office hits, and the PlayStation 2 hype was giving way to reality? Will late 2016 be too soon to start all of that? Let us know!**

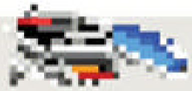


# From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

**Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…**

## Your favourite Shoot-'Em-Up







**gman72**
*Super Aleste* on the SNES is a favourite of mine. It's fast-paced and has some great weapons.

**AEric**
*Sol-Feace* that came bundled with the Mega-CD. The excellent music and anime cutscenes were fresh and new at the time as was the voice reading the intro story.

**The Laird**
Extremely hard choice but I am going to say *Blazing Lazers* on the TurboGrafx, the PC Engine probably has the best selection of shoot-'em-ups of any console and this one stands out for me as the best of the bunch.

**deKay**
I really liked *Project X* for the Amiga, although using space to select power-ups meant putting the machine on the floor and using it as a foot pedal.

**Hiro**
*Battle Squadron* on the Amiga. It's a glorious blaster and could have been mistaken for an arcade game at the time.

**crusto**
Modern day would be *Gradius V* for PS2, it's beautiful. If we are talking retro then it's probably the original *Gradius*, IIRC it was the first shooter I played and got addicted to.

**markopoloman**
I don't really like shoot-'em-ups but fell in love with *Delta* on the C64. I know there are a lot of memory moments in the game but it had fantastic graphics, the best soundtrack to any game ever and was a game that made me want to return for more.

**joefish**
It has to be *R-Type* in the arcade. The weapons, controls and amazing level and creature design still stand out and are what everyone wanted to copy.

**ArchaicKoala**
The first one I properly played and enjoyed was *Ikaruga* on the Dreamcast. The ship polarity system really sucked me in and got me hooked, and it looked stunning on VGA.

**Mayhem**
I'm going to plump for *Area 88* (AKA *UN Squadron*) on the SNES, because it took a reasonable arcade machine and turned the dial up to 11, improving it for the home version.

**samhain81**
*Axelay* – An absolute jaw dropper. Stunning environments, amazing graphics with a mixture of vertical/horizontal stages, topped off with one of the best 16-bit soundtracks to date.


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# Time Trap Arcade

## Chris Hoyle tells us about the classic arcade that he's recently opened at the Cherry Blossom Inn in Blackpool



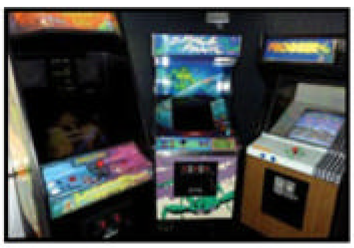
» The location is extremely lavish, while the machines look to be in incredible condition.



**Why create the Time Trap Arcade?**
It seemed like a natural next step, having collected and restored over 50 classics over 20 years, I wanted to recreate something special as a tribute to all those Eighties arcades, which used to exist on Blackpool Promenade – hence the promenade location. My friends and I used to basically live on Blackpool promenade, great times! I remember knocking on the door of Purple Penny Arcade at 8:55am every Saturday morning waiting for the doors to open – it was a great feeling being in the arcade without having to queue up for machines!

**How did you choose the cabinets for your arcade?**
I went for best sellers – like *Space Invaders*, *Pac-man*, *Galaxian* and *Donkey Kong*, but there are some special additions like *Dragon's Lair* and a Universal *Space Panic* – fantastic artwork on that one and the first ever platform game… I think!

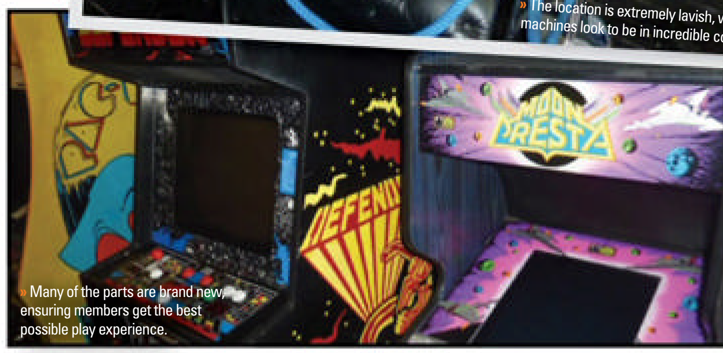
**What is special about your games?**
Because of the time and money invested, the machines look and play just how you remember them. I have sourced pristine original (NOS) parts from all over the planet to make this happen. The Midway *Space Invaders*, for example, has a never used original monitor inside with about 20 hours play from new in 1978! It looks fantastic!


» What to play first? *Space Panic* looks tempting.



» *Storage Hunters*' Jesse McClure shows off his *Track & Field* skills.

You can get more information at www.timetraparcade.com or contact Chris directly at owner@timetraparcade.com



» Many of the parts are brand new, ensuring members get the best possible play experience.

**What's the rarest game you have?**
In the Time Trap arcade, it's probably the Universal *Space Panic*, although I also have a Universal *Mr. Do!*, which although very popular, it seems to be quite rare here in the UK. In my wider collection it's probably my *Sega Carnival* (not Sega/Gremlin) – the artwork on that thing looks luminous and is truly amazing.

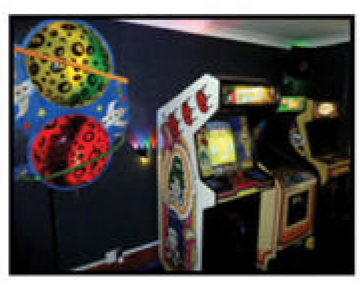
**What's the latest machine and will machines be rotated?**
The last machine I added was the *Dragon's Lair* one, and yes some machines will be rotated. The ones everyone expects to see like *Defender*, *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* will stay permanently.

**Why are you using a membership scheme and limiting to 50 people?**
It preserves the machines for serious retro game enthusiasts, and the arcade won't become overloaded – I want it to feel like a VIP experience. You can still book in through the 'Functions and Events' bookings route, we cater for product launches, private parties and corporate or VIP events: its all part of what we offer as the other function area overlooking the Blackpool Promenade is ten metres away from the arcade.

**What does a membership cost and what does it give you access to?**
It's £250 for the Members Club which is once per month (all machines on Free Play) with additional arcade special events and Eighties nights (which will have live music) and occasional complimentary drinks. So it works out to be great value. What is really special is the location; you can use all the great facilities available at the Cherry Blossom Inn (an iconic Victorian Hotel) including the function suite – sit in a luxurious Chesterfield, sipping a beer, wine, coffee, just a few feet away from your favourite classic games, listening to Eighties music with a premiere view of the promenade! Quality nostalgia!

**How did you meet up with *Storage Hunter*'s Jesse McClure?**
We did a joint arcade talk last year when he was over in the UK; he is a certified retro arcade nut! I introduced him to the Time Trap Arcade, which he loved, hence the video tour which you can see at www.timetraparcade.com.

**Why do you think arcade games remain so popular?**
Classics are timeless, whether it's Elvis, Wurlitzer, Cars (Eighties of course!) or great works of art – which I truly believe arcade machines are and always will be! *



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# next month

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## As it enters its 25th anniversary, key racing developers celebrate the legacy and impact of Nintendo's futuristic racer

### Dungeon Keeper

■ The developers of the hit Bullfrog game explain its origins and the creation of its popular sequel

### Magnavox Odyssey

■ We reveal the exciting story behind the very first commercial home videogame system



### Top 25 Xbox games

■ Readers vote for the greatest Xbox games of all time. Will Master Chief take the top spot?

## And much more, including…

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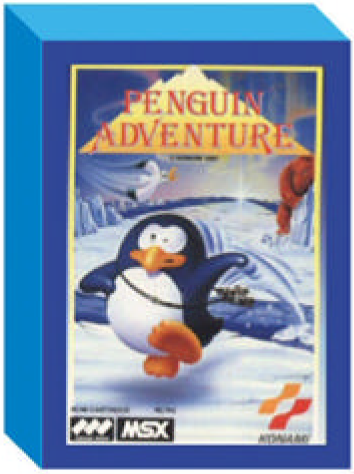

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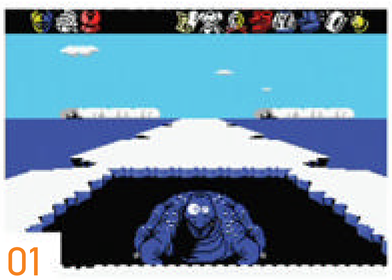

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# ENDGAME




## PENGUIN ADVENTURE

» While it initially gained fame as one of the best MSX games, Penguin Adventure is most famous these days as Hideo Kojima's first videogame, as he served as assistant director. The unusual rear-perspective pseudo-3D platform game follows Penta's quest to find a golden apple to cure the sickly penguin princess, Penguette. Let's join him as he does battle with the fearsome final boss…



01

» Success! Penta has managed to cut a hole around the beast, sending it plummeting to its doom. Now he can retrieve the golden apple and get on with curing Penguette. Congratulations Penta, you are the hero of the penguin kingdom!



02

» Penta has always dreamed of an NFL career – one which he'll unfortunately never have, due to fact that he's short, can't catch or tackle well, and is a penguin. None of this has stopped him practicing a touchdown dance, though.



03

» Figuring that if he doesn't show his moves now, he may never get the opportunity again, Penta stages an routine involving a backup dancers and pyrotechnics worth £400,000. The dance seems to go on for an eternity.




04

» Oh no. *Oh no.* Penta might have retrieved the golden apple, but that doesn't matter anymore. Nothing matters to the penguin kingdom now, as the passing of Penguette is being mourned by all. Hey Penta, how does it feel to have let a princess die for the sake of your ego, you absolute jerk?




05

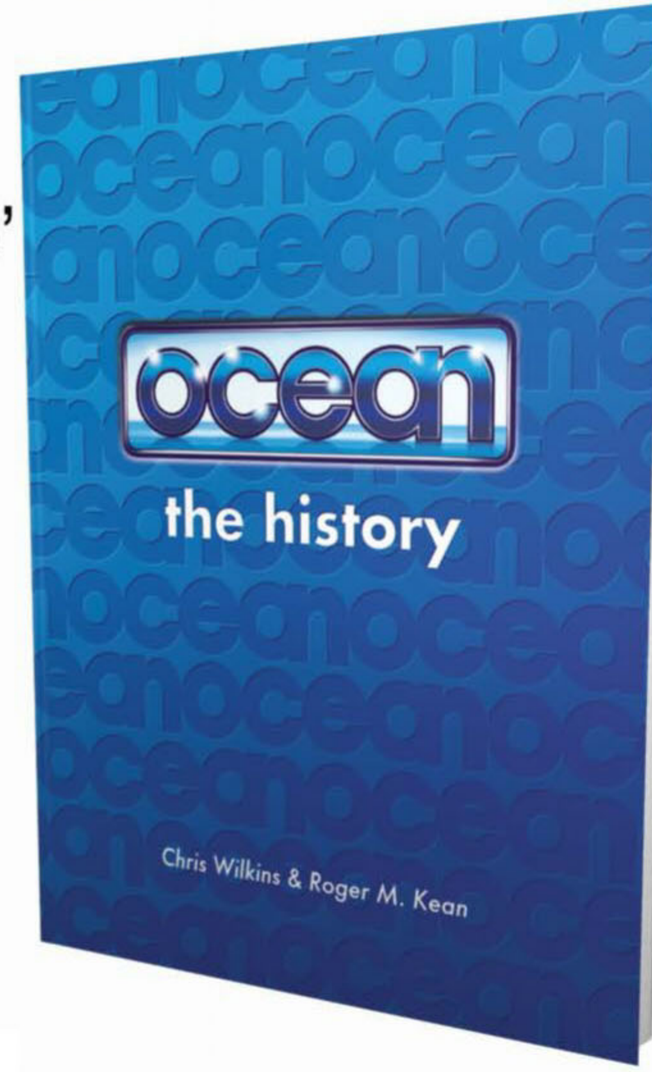
» And of course, according to Konami, that's a 'romantic message'. That's pretty warped, guys. Of course, there is a nicer ending. If you want to see it you'll have to play through the game again, remembering that you can only pause a certain number of times – one, five, nine and so on.

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-David Ward

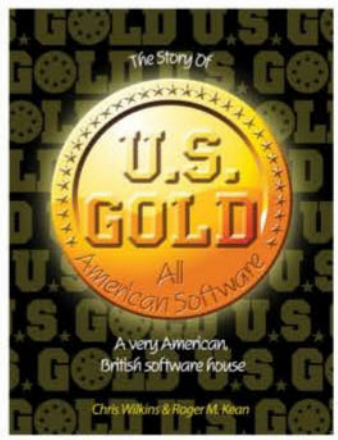
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